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ALF'S BUTTON

An Extravaganza in Three Acts

BY

W. A. DARLINGTON

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PERSONS OF THE PLAY

PRIVATE BILL GRANT 1ST TERRITORIAL 2ND TERRITORIAL LANCE-CORPORAL GREENSTOCK 3RD TERRITORIAL SERGEANT LEES PRIVATE ALF HIGGINS THE SLAVE OF THE BUTTON CAPTAIN RICHARDS LIEUTENANT DENIS ALLEN ORDERLY LADY ISOBEL FITZ PETER MUSTAPHA LIZ WALKER (<i>Alf's fiancée</i>) REV. JULIAN DAVIES, <i>Vicar of Dunwater</i> MRS. DAVIES BRIGADIER-GENERAL LORD DUNWATER, <i>Provost Marshal</i> NEGROES, SLAVES, etc.	}	<i>5th Middlesex Fusiliers</i>
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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I. April 10th, 1917.

Scene : Devastated area behind British lines.

Act II. May 7th, 1917.

Scene : Somewhere in France ; then
Hall at Denmore Manor.

Act III. May 8th, 1917.

Scene : Same as in Act II.

NOTE FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION

It has been found in practice that, except in Act I, it is unnecessary to provide for "magical" effects when the Djinn appears or disappears. Once the fact of his supernatural quality has been established, he can, if desired, enter and leave the stage like any other character.

The usual method in professional production is to have trick scenery in Act I, and to mask the entrances and exits with a puff of gunpowder smoke. But it has been found equally effective to have a quick "black out." If a single loud stroke on a gong is sounded in the middle of the "black out," the moment of darkness is made to seem much shorter, and the atmosphere of mystery is deepened.

As regards the quick change of scenery at the end of the play (page 70), professional practice has been to make this with the aid of trick scenery, clothing, etc., in which case it can be done so swiftly that it requires no covering by action on the stage.

As this will be beyond the powers of many amateur societies, an Invocation to the Slaves of the Button is included at the beginning of this acting edition, to be delivered by the Djinn, "Eustace," while the change of scenery is being carried through.

Properly timed, and spaced out by effects as suggested, this will serve to hold the attention of the audience during the two minutes or so during which the action is held up. It can, of course, be expanded as found necessary.

INVOCATION

Djinn. O all ye djinns, spirits of the upper air or of the lower deeps, come at my call. I am he that was Abdulkindeelilajeeb, Slave of the Wonderful Lamp, now called Abdulzirrilajeeb, Slave of the Wonderful Button, named by my master by the honourable title of Eustace. Come hither, I command you.

(A medley of eerie noises—rumbling, whistling, gongs, a rushing sound, etc.—breaks out.)

Hearken to the commands laid upon his servants by our great Master, Alf the Warrior, Lord of the Button and of all the slaves of the Button.

(Renewed uproar.)

The Lord Alf is weary of this habitation that has been prepared for him. He desireth that it shall be taken away and scattered, with all that is in it of beauty and wealth, so that not one trace remaineth of all its magnificence.

(Another outbreak of sound.)

Furthermore, ye are to restore to its place the humble tenement which formerly rested upon this spot. These are the commands of the great Master. About them, ye servants of the Button, with all speed.

(The noises are heard in crescendo. Then little by little they die down. The lights go up gradually, and reveal the hall of Denmore Manor, now once more an ordinary oak-panelled country house.)

This play was first presented in London by Martin Henry at the Prince's Theatre on December 24th, 1924, with the following cast :

PRIVATE BILL GRANT	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Ambrose Thorne</i>
PRIVATE WEST	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Herbert Young</i>
PRIVATE THOMPSON	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Douglas Stanley</i>
PRIVATE KENT	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Victor Blake</i>
LANCE-CORPORAL GREENSTOCK	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Edward Ouston</i>
SERGEANT LEES	.	.	.	.	.	<i>E. C. Hawken</i>
PRIVATE ALF HIGGINS	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Tubby Edlin</i>
THE SLAVE OF THE BUTTON	.	.	.	.	.	<i>George F. Ide</i>
CAPTAIN RICHARDS	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Emerton Court</i>
LIEUTENANT DENIS ALLEN	.	.	.	.	.	<i>George Thirkwell</i>
LADY ISOBEL FITZ PETER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Jane Welsh</i>
MUSTAPHA	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Arthur Pitt</i>
LIZ WALKER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Hazel Jones</i>
ANIS-AL-JALIS (LUCY)	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Esmé Fitzgibbon</i>
ZUBAIDAH (AGNES)	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Doris Johnstone</i>
SITT-AL-HUSN (dancer)	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Pippyn Manning</i>
REV. JULIAN DAVIES	.	.	.	.	.	<i>James Carrall</i>
MRS. DAVIES	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Ada Palmer</i>
LORD DUNWATER	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Forbes Dawson</i>

Producers : E. DAGNALL and HOLMAN CLARK.

The fee for each and every representation of this play by amateurs is Three Guineas, payable in advance to—

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of their authorized agents, who, upon payment of the fee, will issue a licence for the performance to take place.

No performance may be given unless this licence has been obtained.

The following particulars are needed for the issue of a licence :

Title of the play(s).
Name of the town.
Name of the theatre or hall.
Date of the performance(s).
Name and address of applicant.
Name of the Society.
Amount remitted.

Character costumes and wigs used in the performance of plays contained in French's Acting Edition may be obtained from Messrs. CHARLES H. FOX, Ltd., 184 High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

ALF'S BUTTON

ACT I

You are looking at what is left of a street in a French village evacuated by the Germans in Hindenburg's retreat in the early spring of 1917. The place has almost been levelled with the ground by artillery fire, but on your right is a building of which enough has been left standing for it to be used, temporarily at least, as a billet by No. 9 Platoon, "C" Company, 5th Middlesex Fusiliers. If you were to climb up on to the partially demolished wall of a neighbouring ruin, you would get a good view of a landscape consisting chiefly of shell-holes full of fætid water, and smashed wire entanglements on which flutter discoloured rags. A main road is seen on the left stretching away into the distance. Once it was an avenue, bordered with two lines of tall trees. Now, the tallest of these is a stump perhaps five feet high.

In front of the billet, and inside it, is a plentiful supply of straw; how procured, ten miles behind the front line, we had better not enquire; and anyhow, the Company Q.M.S. would not be likely to tell us. On the straw and inside the billet the majority of No. 9 platoon are lounging; most of them engaged in cleaning buttons, cap-badges and shoulder titles, which have to be resumed now that the Battalion has come out of the line.

With most of these men we are not particularly concerned, as we are going to see practically nothing of them. Indeed, the only one you need know by name is PRIVATE BILL GRANT, who has secured himself in a comfortable place in the thickest part of the straw, and is holding forth to several of his fellow-Territorials.

BILL. Well, 'ere's a nice little 'ome-from-'ome, I must say.

1ST TERRITORIAL. What I like about you, Bill Grant, is you're always so satisfied. We never hear a grouse pass your lips.

BILL. Ho, very sarcastic! (*He waves a contemptuous hand to indicate the home-from-home.*) Call that a billet? Why, at 'ome you wouldn't give even a pig an open-work sty.

2ND TERRITORIAL. Well, anyhow, it don't matter much. We're only stopping here a couple of days, an' then we'll 'ave three weeks' rest.

BILL. Ah, an' 'ow do we know what's goin' to 'appen to us? Prob'ly we'll be back in the blinkin' front line to-morrow.

(*Enter LANCE-CORPORAL GREENSTOCK.*)

CORPORAL. 'Ullo, Grant. At it again? What's bitin' you now, eh?

1ST TERRITORIAL. Doesn't like his billet, Corporal.

CORPORAL. What's wrong with it?

2ND TERRITORIAL. 'Tisn't what he's bin used to. He misses his vally, as used to turn his hot bath on for him.

CORPORAL. Well, anyhow, it's better than that last lot o' trenches. Worst bit o' line I ever been in, an' I seen some cokers.

3RD TERRITORIAL. All right they were, s'long as the frost 'eld. It was the thaw as done us in. Up to the waist in water's no blinkin' joke—specially when the water's freezin' again round you. Lucky Fritz was quiet.

2ND TERRITORIAL. Come to think of it, Fritz 'ad enough to keep him quiet. 'E must 'ave bin up to 'is waist too.

BILL. Lumme, it was cold.

CORPORAL. Well, any'ow, you did 'ave a tunic—an' that's more'n yer pal Alf 'Iggins 'ad.

(*They all laugh.*)

3RD TERRITORIAL. Where *is* ole Alf?

CORPORAL. Sergeant sent 'im to the Q.M.'s store for another.

2ND TERRITORIAL. Poor ole Alf! Think of 'im goin' about with 'is tunic mended with rope. Pathetic, I call it.*

BILL (*savagely*). It was 'is own bloomin' fault. What's 'e want to go an' get stuck in a mud-'ole for, an' 'ave to be lugged out by the collar? Tunics ain't made for such doings.

2ND TERRITORIAL. Lumme, you 'ave got it bad, Bill, an' no mistake. What's up? We're goin' back for a rest. Ain't that enough for you?

BILL. No, it ain't. I'm fed up—fed up with the 'ole blinkin' show. I wants a roof over me 'ead—not a bit o' trellis-work. I wants a bed to sleep in—not a bundle o' second-'and straw. I wants an English girl to talk to, an' a drink o' English beer.

1ST TERRITORIAL. You don't want much!

BILL. Well, ain't I got a right to it? What about the month's rejoinin' leave as Alf an' me get when our five years' service is up?

CORPORAL. You'll get it, when it's due.

BILL. Well, I wants it now. If we 'ave to wait another three weeks till it comes due, Alf an' me may be done in without ever 'avin' 'ad it. Fed up—that's what I am. Fed up!

(He retires into the billet.)

(Enter SERGEANT LEES.)

SERGEANT. Corporal Greenstock, take these men an' report for duty at the Q.M.'s store. 'E wants a carryin' party. Know yer way ?

CORPORAL. No, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Straight down the street, an' turn to the right at York Dump. Biggish 'ouse on the left. You can't miss it. It's got a door.

(CORPORAL gets his squad together and marches it off. As they go, BILL'S head appears round the door, and he kisses his hand to the 1ST TERRITORIAL, who pulls a face in return.)

(Enter PRIVATE ALF HIGGINS, with his overcoat on, carrying the new tunic over his arm. He looks round, surprised at seeing nobody. He goes to his pack and extracts a toothbrush and some "Soldiers' Friend." He sits down on his pack, dabs the toothbrush in the paste, and is about to start work on the top button of the tunic, when BILL emerges with suddenness from the billet.)

BILL *(loudly)*. Oi !

(ALF springs up apprehensively.)

ALF. Lumme, Bill, 'ow you startled me ! I thought you was the Sergeant.

(He sits down again and begins to clean top button.)

BILL. There is one thing about bein' in the line, we don't 'ave our blinkin' buttons to clean. S'pose we shall start 'avin' p'rades again to-morrow. Lord, 'ow I 'ates 'em !

ALF *(with disgust)*. Parades !

BILL. Alf—d'yer suppose we shall ever get that month's leave of ours ?

ALF *(appalled, laying down his tunic)*. I 'ope so, Bill. I—I ain't seen my girl not for nearly a year. She's gettin' anxious too.

BILL *(grimly)*. And well she may.

ALF. I got a letter from 'er this mornin'. *(He feels in his pocket and brings out a small black linen bag.)* She made me this 'ere. See them forget-me-nots on it ? She worked them, so's I shouldn't forget 'er.

(BILL grunts ; ALF fishes a letter out of the bag and reads it.)

Dear Alf, I write these few scrapes, 'oping it finds you as it leaves me in the pink. Oh Alf when are you going to get a bit o' leave——

BILL (*interjecting*). Ah!

ALF (*resuming*). Dear Alf I want to see you so bad. I got a new place, Alf, housemaid to Lady Isobel Fitz Peter what you see the pictures of in the papers, dear Alf it is a hospital for officers owing to the war. Dear Alf, she is lovely and her father Lord Dunwater is a nice old gentleman with nice ways. Dear Alf I shouldn't 'ave got such a good place only such a lot of girls is doin' munitions. Dear Alf when you get your leave the address is Dunwater Park near Reading Berkshire. Dear Alf. I . . . (*He breaks off and concludes coyly.*) That's all there is for you, Bill.

BILL. Nice ways—Lord Dunwater! D'yer know 'oo 'e is?

ALF. No.

BILL. 'Ead of the Military Police!

ALF. Lumme! 'E's a good bloke to steer clear of . . . Ain't you got a girl, Bill?

BILL. Not a girl. Girls. I don't 'old with tyin' yourself down.

ALF. I wish I 'ad Liz 'ere.

BILL. Talkin' of wishes, if you 'ad only one wish, would you wish to see Liz or to 'ave a pint of bitter?

ALF (*reflectively*). Well, I'm very fond of Liz—but I could do with a pint of bitter.

BILL (*producing a bottle from his pocket*). Beer's off, I'm afraid—but 'ow about this?

ALF. What is it?

BILL. Burgundy, they calls it.

ALF. 'Ow did yer get it?

BILL. Scrounged it—an' these 'ere gaspers too.

ALF (*examining it*). It looks a bit like red ink.

BILL. It tastes a bit like that too. But it's grand stuff. Makes you feel fine. It's what the officers drink.

(*During this ALF has produced a corkscrew and a mug; they both drink—BILL deeply, ALF with circumspection.*)

ALF. Do the officers 'ave to drink this?

BILL. Yes.

ALF. Ain't it a dreadful war!

(*They light up the scrounged "gaspers."*)

BILL. Think they'll ever make me an officer, Alf?

ALF (*comfortably*). I shouldn't worry if I was you.

(Here the unaccustomed Burgundy begins to take effect on BILL. He eyes his cigarette with an air of disillusion.)

BILL. Tastes funny !

ALF. I like 'em all right.

(Pause.)

BILL. Smells funny !

ALF. I like 'em all right.

(BILL has another puff, and throws his cigarette away.)

BILL. I'd like to find the bloke as made 'em.

ALF *(resuming his polishing operations)*. I like 'em all right.

BILL *(rising with solemnity)*. Excuse me, Alf.

(ALF rises and bows with equal solemnity. BILL lurches unsteadily into the billet.)

ALF *(sitting down, and transferring his button-stick to the second button of his tunic)*. Good thing Bill didn't join the Navy. . . . Lord, I wish something would 'appen !

(He begins to polish—and gets his wish. There is a rumble and a flash, and a moment's darkness, after which you can see a large green DJINN standing behind ALF, who is still polishing, unaware that he is no longer alone. He takes the cigarette from his lips and eyes it curiously.)

ALF. Bill was right—they do smell funny !

(He turns round, and sees the DJINN. He utters a yell of terror, and shrinks away. His hand encounters the Burgundy bottle, and he mutters to himself, "Lumme, I mustn't have any more of this.")

DJINN *(bowing and speaking in a sepulchral voice)*. What wouldst thou have ? I am ready to obey thee as thy slave, and the slave of any who have that Button in their possession. I and the other slaves of that Button.

ALF *(appalled)*. Well, strike me pink !

DJINN. Strike thee pink ? Verily, my Lord's command is strange ! Nevertheless, I hear and obey.

(He makes a gesture towards ALF, who immediately turns a brilliant pink colour. The DJINN vanishes.)

(BILL enters from the billet.)

BILL. I feels a bit better now. I . . . *(He sees ALF and staggers back.)* Lor' lumme !

ALF *(startled)*. What's the matter, Bill ?

BILL. Matter? *Look at yourself!*

ALF (*looking at his hands, and realising his plight for the first time*). What's 'appened?

BILL. Why, you must 'ave got measles an' scarlet-fever an' smallpox an'—an' nettle-rash all mixed up! D'yer *feel* bad?

ALF. No. No more'n usual. (*Terrified.*) Bill, what's the matter with me?

BILL. That's for the doctor to say, if I can find him. You wait 'ere.

(*He dashes off in quest of the M.O. ALF, left alone, gets a bit of glass from his pack and examines his face despondently. He feels his pulse, looks at his tongue, and shakes his head. Then he notices his tunic still lying on the ground and picks it up. He finds the button-stick still in position. He looks at this with a dawning idea that it may have something to do with his adventure. He sits down and scratches his head thoughtfully.*)

ALF (*aloud*). I wonder! That spook said something about a button!

(*He picks up his toothbrush and makes as if to rub the button, but hesitates. After a struggle with himself however, he rubs it. The DJINN immediately reappears.*)

DJINN. What wouldst thou have?

ALF. It *is* the button!

DJINN. I am ready to obey thee as thy slave, and the slave of any that have that Button in their possession. I, and the other slaves of the Button.

ALF. Look 'ere, was it *you* turned me this ruddy colour?

DJINN. Indeed, master, with thine own lips thou didst command me to strike thee pink.

ALF. Oh! . . . Well, if that's your idea of a joke, it ain't mine, that's all. You can just blinkin' well think again, if you want to make *me* laugh. See?

DJINN (*not understanding*). Thy wish is my command. What wouldst thou have? I am ready to obey thee as thy slave. . . .

ALF. Oh, stop it. I didn't *want* yer to turn me pink. 'Tain't likely I should ask yer to do a silly thing like that. Put me right, for the Lord's sake!

(*The DJINN waves his arms. ALF turns his normal colour, to his great joy.*)

DJINN. Has the great master any further commands for his servant?

ALF. N-no. . . . 'Ere, tell me. 'Ow do you come to be my servant?

DJINN. Lord, I am chief of the slaves of the Button that was aforetime the Lamp. Whosoever may be Lord of the Button him do I serve and perform all his will—I, and the other slaves of the Button.

ALF. And 'ave I got to be your master?

(*The DJINN bows.*)

Well, I dunno 'ow we shall get on, but if I must, I s'pose I must. Where was your last place?

DJINN (*puzzled*). Master?

ALF (*trying to translate it into the Oriental idiom*). 'Oo didst you—thou—servedst before you comest to me?

DJINN. The great prince, 'Ala-ad-deen.

ALF. Never 'eard of 'im. Prince 'oo?

DJINN. 'Ala-ad-deen.

ALF. Oh! I see! You mean Aladdin—the pantomime feller. 'E 'ad a lamp, I remember. Lumme, you must be gettin' on in years.

DJINN. Many centuries was I the slave of the Lamp, great master; until men came that melted the Lamp to a boiling liquid, and made of it thy Button. Now, therefore, am I the slave of that Button.

ALF. And what's yer name, cocky?

DJINN. 'Abdulkindeelil'ajeeb was I aforetime, O master, but now I am called 'Abdulzirril'ajeeb.

ALF. Gorblimey, I can never remember that. I shall call you Eustace.

EUSTACE (*pleased*). In truth, it is a beautiful name from a beautiful master.

ALF. Beautiful! That's good—I must tell Bill that! . . . 'Op it now, there's somebody coming.

(*EUSTACE vanishes, as BILL enters with SERGEANT LEES.*)

SERGEANT. Well! Now what's the matter? Are you ill?

ALF. Er . . . er . . .

SERGEANT. Stand to attention when you talk to me. Put your tunic on! Go on!

(*He stands over ALF to superintend this operation; then he stands back and surveys him.*)

You're all right. (*He turns to BILL.*) He ain't ill.

BILL (*on the defensive*). I tell yer 'e was all pink, with eyes like a guinea-pig.

SERGEANT (*with a dark suspicion that he is having his lordly leg pulled*). I've 'ad enough of you two. Any more of this, an' I'll stop yer bloomin' leave!

(*He departs grumbling.*)

ALF. Bill, I've got a surprise for you.

BILL. What—goin' to change colour again?

ALF. I seen a spook.

BILL. *Spook?*

ALF. Yes. He came bouncin' in when I rubbed this button and asked me for orders . . . same as Aladdin . . . you know, the chap with the lamp.

BILL (*solemnly*). Alf, don't you 'ave any more Burgundy.

ALF. It wasn't Burgundy, Bill. It was a spook. I tell yer.

BILL. You're dreamin'.

ALF. Dreamin' be blowed. I couldn't dream myself pink all over, could I?

BILL. Well, I bet you can't make *me* see this blessed spook of yours.

ALF. Can't I? (*He rubs the button*). I'll show yer!

(EUSTACE *appears*.)

BILL (*giving ground*). Lor!

EUSTACE (*ready to vanish*). Is it again thy will, great master, that thy servant should hop it?

ALF. No—'arf a tick, Eustace! (*To BILL*.) Well, can yer see it?

BILL. I sh'd think I can. . . . What is it?

ALF. I told yer.

BILL. Well, what can it do?

ALF (*hopelessly*). I dunno!

BILL. Ask it, then. It says you're its master.

ALF. I dunno what to say. You ask it, if you want something.

BILL. All right. I'm not afraid of any foreign spook. (*He approaches EUSTACE jauntily, though with some misgiving, and digs him in the ribs.*) What can you do, mate?

EUSTACE (*in a voice of thunder*). O Master, Lord of Might, if it be thy will, bid me fall upon this irreverent dog and instantly reduce him to ashes.

ALF. Bill, 'e likes yer! (*To EUSTACE*.) This 'ere's my pal, Mr. Grant—see? No monkeyin' about, now. (*In a stage whisper.*) Apologise, Bill—go on, apologise.

BILL. No offence, I 'ope, mate!

(EUSTACE *bows gravely*.)

ALF. Well, answer the question. You keep askin' for orders—what's yer particular line?

EUSTACE. My Lord hath but to command.

ALF. Garn—swank ! 'Ere, Bill, what shall I tell 'im to do ?

BILL (*without hesitation*). Mine's a bitter.

ALF. That's it—two pints, please, Eustace.

(EUSTACE *is puzzled.*)

Compris ? Beer—stuff to drink. (*He makes the gesture of drinking.*)

(EUSTACE *looks enlightened, and vanishes. A moment later two carved goblets appear at ALF's feet. He and BILL take one apiece.*)

BILL (*smacking his lips*). Ah ! This looks something like ! Bit 'olesale in 'is ways, though, ain't 'e ? Seems to think we're the Guild'all.

ALF } together. Good 'ealth ! (*Their heads go back in unison.*
BILL }

Also in unison, they give a tremendous splutter.)

BILL. My gawd, I'm poisoned. What the 'ell is it ?

ALF (*trying to get rid of the remains from his palate*). Tastes like a mixture of 'oney an' ink, with a dash o' disinfectant. 'Ere, I'll 'ave that blinkin' spook back an' tick 'im orf !

(*He rubs the button fiercely.*)

(EUSTACE *appears.*)

EUSTACE (*bowing*). What wouldst thou have ? I am ready . . .

ALF. Shut it. You're a lot too ready, seems to me. We're 'arf poisoned with the muck you've brought.

EUSTACE. Great master, these are the choicest wines of Arabia.

ALF. Gawd 'elp Arabia, then. I asked for beer—B-E-A-R, beer. D'yer mean to say they don't 'ave it in Arabia ?

(EUSTACE *shakes his head.*)

Poor blighters. No wonder they're 'eathens.

BILL. Well, beer is—er—beer's—er, well it's . . . I say, Alf, 'ow *can* yer explain beer to anyone as doesn't know what it is ?

ALF. Brown stuff it is, made from 'ops an' malt—an' the dickens of a lot o' water. You just 'op over to Blighty. You'll soon see.

(EUSTACE *vanishes. BILL turns impressively to his friend.*)

BILL. Alf, ole man, we're made. We can do anything we blinkin' well like from now on. Understand that ?

ALF. I dunno. It don't seem right to me some'ow. I don't like it.

(Two more goblets appear.)

Lumme, 'e's done it again.

(They smell the tankards with grave suspicion, which changes to smiles. They drink.)

BILL. That's the goods. Ole Aladdin knew a thing or two. Let's 'ave another o' the same and drink 'is 'ealth.

ALF. No.

BILL. What?

ALF. It'll 'urt Eustace's feelin's. S'posin' you was a spook as could do all you say Eustace can, 'ow'd you like to be sent all the way to 'ell for a couple o' bloomin' pints?

BILL. Make it 'ogs'eds, then.

ALF. No. We been keepin' 'im on the go pretty fair as it is, the last few minutes. I don't like askin' 'im niggling little things like that.

BILL *(annoyed)*. Very well, don't then. But if yer won't oblige a pal with a thirst, why don't yer get on with it an' *do* something with yer pet devil? Why—why —*(an inspiration)* you might stop the war!

ALF *(startled)*. Stop the *what*?

BILL. Stop the war. Send ole Eustace over to Germany an' tell 'im to fetch the Kayser 'ere.

ALF. The Kayser?

BILL. Yes. Can't yer see the Sergeant-Major's face if we turned up at the orderly-room with 'im under arrest?

ALF *(stolidly)*. I can see *us* put under arrest.

BILL. Us? We'd get the V.C.

ALF. More like the C.B.

BILL. Think of it. "Privates Alf 'Iggins an' Bill Grant, the 'eroes as captured the Kayser." I see us gettin' in the papers.

ALF. Yes. An' *I* see us gettin' in the clink.

BILL. But look 'ere, yer fat-'eaded chump, I tell yer . . .

ALF *(obstinately)*. It's no good talkin'. It's my button an' my spook.

(CAPTAIN RICHARDS and LIEUTENANT ALLEN stroll in. They are inspecting billets.)

If you wants to start that sort o' game, you just go an' find yerself a button an' a spook o' yer own.

BILL. The matter with you, Alf, is you got no brains.

ALF. Oh ! I s'pose nobody's got any brains but you ! You're always sayin' the officers got no brains, an' now . . .

(He looks up, and stiffens to attention as he finds the said officers regarding him. Both men conceal their goblets.)

RICHARDS. Don't move, men. Whose billet is this ?

ALF. Number 9 platoon, sir.

ALLEN. Where are the rest ?

ALF. On fatigue, sir.

ALLEN. Why aren't you on fatigue too ?

ALF. Weren't detailed, sir.

RICHARDS. Your lucky day, evidently.

ALF }
BILL } *(woodenly)*. Yessir.

(The OFFICERS inspect the billet.)

RICHARDS. Poor place, I'm afraid.

BILL. It's all right, sir.

ALLEN. Nasty hole in the roof.

BILL. Easy plug it, sir, if it rains.

RICHARDS. Oh, well—we'll hope to get to something more comfortable to-morrow. Coming, Denis ?

ALLEN. Righto. . . . Hallo, Grant, what's that in your hand ?

(ALF and BILL reluctantly produce their tankards. The OFFICERS take one each.)

RICHARDS. Where did you get these ?

BILL *(stolidly)*. Found 'em in the billet, sir.

ALLEN. By Jove, Fritz does do himself well !

RICHARDS *(examining his mug very carefully)*. This must be looted stuff. I'm a bit of an expert on these things in peacetime. That's ancient Oriental work.

ALF *(ingratiatingly)*. If this 'ere is any use to you as a souvenir, sir, I don't set no particular store by it.

BILL. Nor me, sir.

RICHARDS. D'you mean you want to sell ?

ALF. If you like, sir.

RICHARDS. Can't afford it. I don't want to swindle you. Those mugs are worth money.

ALF. That's all right, sir. I thought if we could 'ave about five . . . *(BILL nudges him)* . . . er . . . te . . . *(BILL nudges him again)* . . . er . . . twenty francs apiece, sir.

RICHARDS. All right. Twenty francs apiece is all I can manage

ALF }
BILL } *(together)*. Thank you, sir.

(ALLEN suddenly catches sight of a drop of beer in the mug he is holding. While RICHARDS is talking, he sniffs at it.)

RICHARDS (*paying*). Now mind, when I censor your letters I expect to see some of this sent home. Perhaps I wouldn't give you so much all at once if we were in a place where we can get beer. . . .

ALLEN. Aren't we, though? Smell that!

RICHARDS (*sniffing*). Beer! (*Turning on the two men.*) Well?

ALF (*trying to rise to the occasion*). Yes, sir. I noticed that myself.

RICHARDS. I dare say. The point is, can you explain it?

ALF. I expect, sir, Fritz left the mugs be'ind 'im in the big frost, an' the drops got froze in. Prob'ly thawed again with the warmth of our 'ands.

RICHARDS (*dryly*). Most probable, I should say.

(ALLEN conceals a smile.)

Come on, Denis.

(*The OFFICERS continue on their way.*)

(*ALF and BILL go towards their billet.*)

BILL. 'E don't believe yer.

ALF. 'Course 'e don't, but 'e's a sport, an' 'e likes a good lie.

(*They retire into the billet. Meanwhile the OFFICERS are met by an orderly, who salutes and gives RICHARDS a package.*)

ORDERLY. Officers' letters, sir.

RICHARDS (*going through the packet*). Donaldson—Shaw—Shaw—Shaw—Shaw—Donaldson—Shaw—Shaw. . . . I must talk to young Shaw about this. He's too popular. . . . Two for you, Denis. (*To ORDERLY.*) Take these to the mess, Martin; oh, and put these mugs in my quarters.

(*Exit ORDERLY.*)

ALLEN. Nothing for you, Dickie?

RICHARDS (*tearing the paper from a package*). Nothing but *The Bystander*.

ALLEN. Well, just have a look at it a moment while I find out what my sister's got to say.

(RICHARDS accordingly opens "*The Bystander*," while ALLEN reads his letter.)

RICHARDS (*snorting*). I wish that grinning little idiot would stop advertising herself for a bit.

ALLEN (*absently—reading letter*). Uh?

RICHARDS. You can't pick up a picture-paper without finding her well in the limelight. She wants smacking.

ALLEN (*still absently*). Who is your lady-friend, Dickie?

RICHARDS. Lady Isobel Fitz Peter.

(ALLEN looks up suddenly, but RICHARDS goes on without noticing.)

Here you are—three pages of her. "Nursing the wounded. Lady Isobel Fitz Peter, only daughter of the Earl of Dunwater. Lady Isobel, besides being one of the most beautiful girls in society, is an indefatigable worker in the hospital which her father has established at his lovely country home, Dunwater Park, of which we publish some photographs on another page." I know that hospital. One of those "kiss and wash me" places. Fat lot of work *she* ever does. She makes me sick.

(He hurls "*The Bystander*" from him. It falls into the straw outside the platoon billet.)

ALLEN (*coldly*). Do you happen to know her?

RICHARDS. No. She's never washed *me*!

ALLEN. Well, then, what right have you to say that?

RICHARDS. I've got a cousin who's a V.A.D. in that hospital. She says dear Isobel's an absolute wash-out, so far as doing any work is concerned. She's always dashing up to town for charity matinées and binges. She's frightfully pretty, of course, but her head's been turned.

ALLEN. Your cousin must be a bit of a cat.

RICHARDS. She isn't. She's a damned nice . . . (*He sees ALLEN's expression.*) What have I said, Denis? Do you know the girl?

ALLEN. Yes.

RICHARDS. My dear chap—I'd no idea. Why didn't you stop me? I expect my cousin's all wrong. You know what women are about each other.

ALLEN. No. I'm afraid—it's true. Part of it.

RICHARDS. I'm awfully sorry. If I'd known she was a—friend of yours. . . .

ALLEN. She isn't. I used to play cricket at Dunwater Park before the war, when she was a small schoolgirl. We were rather pals then, but I'd be frightened to death of her if we met now. But—one must have someone to think about out here, you know.

RICHARDS. I'm most frightfully . . .

ALLEN. That's all right. How about getting along to those other billets.

RICHARDS. Righto. (RICHARDS walks on.)

(ALLEN lingers a moment and stealthily tears out "The Bystander" frontispiece and puts it in his pocket-book. Then he follows. As soon as the coast is clear—

(ALF and BILL emerge from the billet. They are in the middle of an argument. BILL is persuasive—ALF obstinate. ALF plumps down in the straw, and finds RICHARDS' discarded "Bystander.")

ALF. No, I tells yer. It's no good talkin' about it any more. I'm not goin' to play about with no Kayzers, not for nobody. (He takes refuge in "The Bystander.")

BILL. Well, what are yer going to do, then ?

(ALF reads.)

What are yer going to do with Eustace ?

ALF. I'm readin'.

BILL. No Kayser—no beer. What's the good of 'avin' the blighted Button ?

(ALF has come across the photographs of Dunwater Park.)

ALF (excited). Lumme, Bill—look 'ere. Dunwater Park. That's where my Liz is. Look at it. Look at the size of it. Fancy my Liz in a place like that.

BILL. She might 'ave a place like that of 'er own if you'd only listen to reason.

ALF. Funny, ain't yer ?

BILL. Look 'ere, Alf. Did yer ever see Aladdin, the panto ?

ALF. Yes.

BILL. Well, what 'appened ?

ALF (after deep thought). There was a bloke sang something about a rose growing in a garden. Pathetic it was.

BILL. I didn't mean that, yer blinkin' fool. What 'appened to Aladdin 'imself ?

ALF. Married someone, I think.

BILL. Yes, but 'oo ?

ALF. I dunno. Princess something.

BILL. Yes. An' they 'ad palaces, an' jools, an' pots o' money, an' everything they wanted. An' 'ow did they get 'em ?

ALF. Well, 'ow ?

BILL. Eustace brought 'em !

ALF (*incredulous, but interested*). Eustace? Garn!

BILL. It's a fact!

ALF. Lumme, I never thought o' that kind o' thing!

BILL. No. You've a proper thick 'ead, you 'ave. Now, you give Eustace something o' that kind to do. 'E'll be all over it—it'll be like old times to 'im. Tell 'im to build yer a palace.

ALF. Buildin' palaces 'ere'd be a blinkin' waste o' time.

BILL. Not 'ere, I don't mean, stoopid. At 'ome. For us to live in when we 'as our leave.

ALF (*without much conviction*). You're barmy!

BILL. Why not? 'E did it for Aladdin—why not for Alf 'Iggins?

ALF. Yes, but Aladdin was a prince, an' 'e married a royal princess.

BILL. 'E wasn't a prince to start with. 'E was a washer-woman's son in the panto, name of Twankey.

ALF (*impressed at last*). Really? Why, my ole mother takes in washin' too.

BILL. There you are, then. Eustace made Aladdin a prince—'e can make you one. Prince 'Iggins. It'd look fine on a brass plate. An' as for princesses, well, so could you marry one if you wanted to. You on'y got to tell Eustace.

ALF. Thanks, but my Liz is good enough for me.

BILL. I'm not saying she ain't a good girl. But now you've got this 'ere spook, she ain't in yer class any more. You ought to marry a real lady. Arter all, Liz is on'y a skivvy.

ALF. Don't you call my Liz names, Bill Grant. I tell yer, she's as good as any princess in the land.

BILL (*jumping at the point*). Well, then, you show 'em she is. Tell Eustace to build yer a palace, an' go an' live in it with Liz. Eustace'll rig you up a place in 'arf a tick as'll make this 'ere Ditchwater Park look like workmen's dwellin's. 'Ave it just opposite. That'll make this Lady Isobel sit up, bein' cut out by her own maid.

ALF (*beginning to see the idea*). Lumme! What a game! (*Pause*.) But we can't go plantin' palaces on other people's land.

BILL. Good for you, Alf. That's true. . . . Well, then we'll 'ave to take a big country 'ouse like this (*tapping picture*), an' Eustace can do it up for us in first-class style. Arter all, if we told Eustace to build us 'is kind o' palace, we'd 'ave the papers an' the police on our tracks. We don't want to be too con-spickshus.

ALF. There mayn't be no big 'ouse empty in the neighbour'ood.

BILL. We can easy send Eustace to see, when our leave comes due.

ALF. I wish it could 'appen now. I want to see Liz.

BILL. Well, then, tell 'im to bring Liz 'ere.

ALF. *What?*

BILL. Just for a 'arf-hour or so. You can send 'er 'ome again before the sergeant comes back. An' tell Eustace to get me a girl too. I'm fair sick for the sight of a pretty face.

ALF. To see Liz! (*He rubs his button excitedly.*)

(EUSTACE appears.)

EUSTACE. What wouldst thou have? I am ready . . .

ALF. Cut out the recitation, Eustace, an' 'ave a squint at this picture. (*Shows EUSTACE "The Bystander."*) Now, s'posin' I wanted you to take an 'ouse like that for me, an' do it up in real slap-up style, could you carry the job through?

EUSTACE. In truth it is not meet that the Lord of the Button should inhabit so mean a dwelling. Command me that I build thee a palace like unto that with which Aladdin dazzled the eyes of the Emperor of China.

ALF. Now look 'ere—we don't want no more of yer 'olesale ways. Can you do what I said?

EUSTACE. Great master, I go.

ALF. 'Ere—don't be so slapdash. This is for later on, see, when our leave comes through—that'll be about three weeks from now.

(EUSTACE bows.)

For the present, all I want yer to do is to 'op over to Blighty an' fetch me my girl.

EUSTACE (*you can see by his expression that this is a commission after his own heart*). Thy maid, great master?

ALF (*impressed*). Now, 'ow did yer know that? 'S matter o' fact, she *is* a maid. 'Ouse-maid. Pretty clever that, Bill—eh?

BILL. Smart lad, Eustace.

EUSTACE. How shall I know thy maid from other maids, O master?

ALF. Well, this is where she lives, see? Dunwater Park's the name, near Reading. It's a big 'ouse—you'll find it easy enough. An' you'll know Liz easy enough too. They prob'ly got a lot o' maids there, but she's small, with golden 'air, an' she's as pretty as paint. You can't miss 'er.

EUSTACE. Great master, I hear and obey.

(*He disappears.*)

BILL. Hi! Come back! 'Ere, Alf—you've forgotten to order one for me.

ALF. All right, Bill. We'll send 'im back for 'er when Liz comes. What'd you like to 'ave?

BILL. One of the 'Ippodrome Chorus.

(LADY ISOBEL FITZ PETER, dressed in the very latest that Paris has designed for the delectation of the officer on leave, suddenly appears looking dazedly about her. The two men, realizing that EUSTACE has made a blunder in social discrimination, are appalled.)

ALF (to BILL). Lumme! 'E's mucked it again. 'E's brought a real lady. Don't 'e know a maid when 'e sees one?

BILL. Well, any'ow, e' knows a pretty girl when 'e sees one. Ain't she a good-looker?

ALF. She is that.

BILL. That's the sort you ought to marry now, Alf.

ALF. Garn! Don't be ridic'lous.

LADY ISOBEL (coming forward). Where am I? Who are you?

ALF. D-don't be frightened, miss; but this 'ere's a village in France, just behind the Front.

(He looks round for BILL, but that gentleman has retired into the background and is making a feline toilet with the aid of a handkerchief.)

LADY ISOBEL. France! The Front! . . . Oh, I'm dreaming. That's it, isn't it?

ALF. Well, miss, it's like this. . . .

LADY ISOBEL. But I was just dressing to go up to town. . . . I don't remember going to bed.

ALF. I'm very sorry, miss. If you please, it's all a mistake, like. If you'll just wait 'arf a tick we'll send you back 'ome again quite all . . .

LADY ISOBEL. Send me back? Indeed you shan't! I've been simply longing to see the Front for myself. They won't let me in real life, and so I won't let you spoil it in a dream. If you only knew how hard I've tried to wangle my way over, and have a look round. I wouldn't miss it for worlds. And I'm sure you'll be very kind and show me round, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .

ALF. 'Iggins—Private Alf 'Iggins, miss, 5th Middlesex Fusiliers.

(BILL approaches, beautified.)

An' this is me pal, Private Grant.

BILL (*bowing gallantly*). Pleasetermeacher, miss.

LADY ISOBEL (*bowing too*). I'm Isobel Fitz Peter.

ALF (*in a hushed voice*). Lady Isobel?

LADY ISOBEL (*pleased*). Yes. How did you know that?

ALF. Well, miss, my girl's . . .

(BILL catches ALF's eye, and adjures him in pantomime not to give away LIZ's lowly status. He then goes off tactfully into the billet.)

LADY ISOBEL. How did you know who I was?

ALF (*swiftly*). By yer picture in the paper, me lady.

LADY ISOBEL (*still more pleased*). Oh, how nice of you. Well, then, you *will* show me round, won't you? (*She gives him one of her noted smiles.*)

ALF (*with reluctance*). 'Appy to, miss—er, me lady. What was you wanting to see, like?

LADY ISOBEL. Everything. I want to see just how you live, and what you do. I want to see a trench and a dug-out and a barrage, and—oh, everything.

ALF. We don't get no barrages back 'ere, thank Gawd—beggin' your pardon, me lady. But we gets a good few bombs.

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, but that's so dull. We have them at home.

ALF. We don't find it dull, miss. Any'ow, better not bother with shells an' such. One might 'it you.

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, but that wouldn't matter in a dream. It would only wake me up.

ALF. It'd wake yer up all right!

LADY ISOBEL. Tell me, what's this?

ALF. Our billet, miss.

(*She inspects it daintily.*)

LADY ISOBEL. Do you *live* here? How perfectly thrilling. What's up this way?

ALF. Comp'ny 'Eadquarters is that way, me lady. We'd best go the other.

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, but I want to see Company Headquarters.

ALF. Best not, miss. I dunno what wouldn't 'appen if our sergeant-major was to see us with you. A fair terror, 'e is.

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, I'll see you don't get into trouble.

ALF. Best not, miss—er, mum, me lady!

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, very well. But I want to see everything you poor men have to put up with. How awful it must be to live here. (*She casts an eye round the scene, and shudders.*)

ALF. Well, o' course, miss, this 'ere village is a bit knocked

about. You see, Fritz was on'y pushed out of it last week, so there ain't much to *be* seen. But if you can just 'op up 'ere (*he climbs up on to the ruined wall, and offers her a hand*) you can see most of it. Mind yer nice gloves, me lady.

LADY ISOBEL (*climbing up*). That'll be awfully nice. You know, I always say that people in England don't realize. . . . Oh! (*This last exclamation is wrung out of her by the sudden knowledge that she herself has never "realized."* There is a pause while she gazes out over the smashed landscape, appalled.)

(ALF makes his way up beside her to do the honours.)

ALF (*apologetically*). I'm afraid there ain't much but wire an' shell-'oles to show you, me lady. This 'ere ground's bin a bit smashed up, like. But see that mound over there on the left? We passed that, marchin' in, an' I heard the Captin' say it was a church once. But you could 'unt all day now, an' never find anything o' the building, bar the church bell.

(LADY ISOBEL gives a shudder; ALF continues gaily.)

See that 'ole over there, miss? That's a smashed-in dug-out, that is. We'd take you to see it, on'y shell-'oles is no walkin' for them boots. 'Sides, there might be one or two things you might not like to see. You never knows.

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, don't—don't. I can't bear it. (*She gives a sob, and climbs down.*)

ALF. Now I've done it—bloomin' fat-'ead.

(LADY ISOBEL begins to cry quietly. She cannot find her handkerchief. ALF produces his, looks at it, and hastily puts it back.)

LADY ISOBEL finds hers, to his relief.)

ALF. I'm awfully sorry, miss, I didn't mean . . .

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, it isn't that. Only I'm so ashamed of myself. But I didn't know. . . . I never imagined . . . (*She breaks off.*)

(BILL re-enters from the billet.)

BILL (*in a loud whisper*). 'Ow're you getting on, mate? Want any 'elp?

ALF. I ain't 'arf made a muck of it.

BILL (*looking round*). Lumme! 'Fre's Lootenant Allen comin' back. Come on. You can see 'er again.

(*He dashes for the billet. ALF hesitates, fingering his button.*)

ALF. I would like to see her again !

(He goes into the billet as ALLEN enters.)

ALLEN *(seeing her)*. My God ! Isobel !

LADY ISOBEL *(gazing at him)*. You !

ALLEN. Isobel ! Am I mad or dreaming ?

LADY ISOBEL *(running to him and catching him by the arm)*. Oh, it's a dream. It must be a dream.

(ALLEN, with the air of a man who has unexpectedly found himself in heaven, takes her in his arms.)

ALLEN *(grimly)*. Oh, it's a dream all right. I shall wake up in a minute and find you've gone. That'll be nothing new. I've dreamt of you so constantly since I've been out here. It's only because we're dreaming that I can tell you this.

LADY ISOBEL. But, Denis—I'm not just a person in your dream. I'm *here*. If I wasn't, I couldn't have been talking to those two Tommies before you came, or have seen that awful place.

(ALF is to be seen in the billet. He rubs the button in great agitation. EUSTACE appears, and ALF motions to him to take LADY ISOBEL away.)

ALLEN. Two Tommies ?

LADY ISOBEL. Yes. Just before you came I was talking to them.

ALLEN. Where did they go, then ?

LADY ISOBEL *(pointing to billet)*. In there, I think.

(ALLEN gets up and takes a few steps towards the billet. At that instant ALF's instructions to EUSTACE take effect : she vanishes.)

ALLEN *(turning towards her casually)*. You're quite sure you . . .

(He breaks off, and gazes about him distractedly. He calls her name wildly once or twice, and then breaks off, finding himself confronted by ALF and BILL.)

ALLEN. How long have you two men been there ?

BILL. Ever since you bought them mugs off us, sir.

ALLEN. Have you seen anybody about here since then ?

ALF. No, sir.

ALLEN (*nervously*). You didn't see a—a lady here a few minutes ago?

ALF (*briskly*). Lady, sir? No, sir!

BILL. No, sir.

ALLEN. You're sure?

ALF. Yessir!

ALLEN (*to himself*). No, of course not.

ALF. Beg pardon, sir, but aren't you feeling quite well?

ALLEN. Why do you ask?

ALF. Well, sir, if you'll excuse me, I see you over there just now talkin' to yerself like, an' I thought p'r'aps . . .

ALLEN. To myself! (*He puts his hand to his head.*) Then . . . then she wasn't . . . I didn't . . .?

ALF. No, sir. . . . Shall I come with you to the Medical Officer, sir?

ALLEN. It's all right—quite all right—er—thanks.

(*He goes off, looking worried.*)

(BILL and ALF look at one another and draw long breaths of relief.)

ALF. Seems rather a shame, don't it?

BILL. Can't be 'elped. Think of the row we should 'ave got into if 'e'd known what really 'ad 'appened.

ALF. Any'ow, that settles it. I ain't goin' to use the blinkin' button again not till we gets back to Blighty and I'm me own master again. 'Tain't safe out 'ere. Eustace is too blinkin' slapdash an' 'olesale.

BILL (*reluctantly*). Well, p'r'aps you're right.

ALF. An' see 'ere—don't 'ave no more talk about princesses—see? I don't say as Lady Isobel ain't a fair knock-out, but Liz is my girl, an' I sticks to 'er as long as she sticks to me—see?

BILL. All right. 'Ave it yer own way. Arter all, it's your button. (*A thought strikes him.*) By the way, 'ow are yer goin' to manage about keepin' it clean? You've got to polish it every mornin' for p'rade; every time you rub it, that'll bring Eustace up for orders.

ALF. Lumme!

BILL. That's another fair knock-out, ain't it?

ALF (*with an inspiration*). No, it ain't.

(*Out of his pocket he fishes the bag that LIZ made for him. He takes the letters out, and puts them away carefully. Then he rips off a piece of the black bag.*)

Liz won't mind—I'll put it in mourning! Lucky it's the button!

(He begins to wrap the black stuff with great care round the button.)

BILL. Good old Alf !

(He slaps his thigh and bursts into a roar of laughter, which he checks as he sees the fatigue party returning.)

(CORPORAL GREENSTOCK enters with his squad, which he halts and dismisses. They are closely followed by SERGEANT LEES.)

SERGEANT. Who's Mess Orderly here ? Time he was going for the dixies. You, Higgins, is it ?

(He notices ALF'S carefully simulated dejection.)

Hullo, what's up now ?

BILL. 'Iggins 'as 'ad bad news, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Sorry to see you're in mourning, Higgins. *(He points to the black button.)* Who's this for ?

ALF. Me . . . me uncle, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Uncle, eh ?

ALF. Yes, Sergeant.

SERGEANT *(not quite knowing whether to believe it)*. An' what was yer uncle's name ?

ALF. Eustace !

Curtain.

ACT II

The SCENE is still set at the Front ; whether near the line or far behind it is impossible to say with certainty, for the curtain rises on darkness almost complete. A single beam of light finding its way into the temporary resting-place of No. 9 Platoon illuminates the face of ALF as he lies in unlovely slumber upon a heap of what appears to be sacking. His mouth is open and he is snoring. From the darkness about him comes the sound of other snorers.

A black shape huddled up beside ALF makes a sudden convulsive movement, and BILL's voice is heard.

BILL. Geraway, yer brute !

(ALF stirs uneasily, but does not wake. BILL sits up, and his face also becomes visible in the gleam.)

BILL. Alf ! I say, Alf. There's a blighted rat biting me neck. Get out, yer beast !

(He aims a blow at the rat with his boot, narrowly missing ALF in the process. ALF is awakened by the thud.)

ALF (*waking*). Wasmarrer ?

BILL. Rat biting me neck.

ALF. Wodjer want to wake me for ? I was dreamin' we was off on our leave.

BILL. Well, so we shall be in about four hours, now we got our papers.

ALF (*sitting up, wide awake*). Lor', Bill, I can 'ardly believe it's true ! Think of us sitting in the leave-train, an' that 'ouse that Eustace 'as fitted up for us comin' nearer every minute.

BILL. Not *every* minute, Alf. You know what leave-trains is ! Prob'ly take us about three days to get down to the Base. Blinkin' waste o' good leave, with Denmore Manor waitin' for us all the time.

ALF (*excited*). Bill ! Look 'ere ! I got an idea ! Couldn't we get Eustace to take us over *now* ?

BILL (*equally excited*). Could we ? Why, o' course we could. Quick—get on with it, before the others wake.

ALF. You don't think there's a catch in it ? Shouldn't we get in a row ?

BILL. No. We got our papers all right. Couldn't be much of a row, and it'd be worth it for a couple more days in Blighty. Quick !

(ALF rubs the button.)

(EUSTACE appears.)

EUSTACE (*loudly*). What wouldst thou have ? I am ready . . .

ALF. Sh ! Not so loud, yer fool, or you'll wake the others.

EUSTACE (*making a pass in the air*). They shall not wake ! What is thy will, great Master ?

ALF (*in more confident tones*). That 'ouse—Denmore Manor—is it all ready for us ?

EUSTACE. Lord, it hath been awaiting thy coming these seven days.

ALF. Then take us there !

BILL (*facetiously*). 'Ome, John !

EUSTACE. Master, I hear and obey.

(*He vanishes. ALF and BILL shut their eyes and brace themselves for a journey through the air. Nothing, however, happens, except that the quality of the darkness about the two men seems to change.*)

ALF. Nothing's 'appened ! 'E's misfired !

BILL. Yes—an' I'm blest if that blinkin' rat isn't at me again !

The light now steadily broadens and brightens, and two beautiful dusky hands become visible moving caressingly about BILL's face, and accounting for his theory as to the return of the rat. In the increasing brightness it is soon to be seen that the hands belong to a languorous-eyed maiden in oriental dress, who is leaning tenderly over BILL while another does a like office for ALF. The sacks upon which the two warriors were reclining are now replaced by a heap of many-coloured cushions, laid in the middle of the big hall at Denmore Manor, ALF's new country residence. The building is, in essentials, what an auctioneer would call "a fine specimen of English domestic architecture." As redecorated by EUSTACE, however, it now presents a strangely un-English appearance. All that can be done to Orientalise the place by hangings on the walls, cushions on the floor in place of chairs, gilt and jewels on the banisters, and so forth, EUSTACE has done.

The hall is, so to speak, the core round which the house is built. All round it are doors opening into the main rooms, or passages connecting with the rest of the building, so that the whole life of the place naturally centres upon the hall. It extends upwards the full two storeys, which is the height of the house, and is lighted by skylights in the roof. On your right, a wide, shallow staircase starts its career at right angles to the side wall, and then, taking a turn to the left, continues to the height of the first floor. At the top of the stairs, if you turn to your left you go along a railed gallery on to which several doors open; this runs right across the stage; if you turn to your right you confront a door leading to the wing appropriated by EUSTACE as the women's quarters, or harem.

On the ground floor, a corresponding door leads to the kitchens; a centre door leads to a big room turned by EUSTACE into an Eastern bath-chamber. On the left of the stage, a wide passage leads to the front hall and front door. In fact, the door can just be descried in the dusk of the passage.

In the recess formed by the projecting end of the staircase a group of Oriental female slaves is collected. They hold musical instruments of strange shapes in their hands and sinuous dancers are posturing to the soft music they make. Various other negroes and slaves are standing about; and MUSTAPHA, a magnificent figure of a man, stands waiting to welcome his new master.

ALF. 'E 'asn't misfired arter all, Bill. But where are we? What's all this?

BILL. Looks a bit like a Turkish bath.

ALF. With a Turkish 'arem thrown in. (*He shakes off the slave who is ministering to him.*) Lemme alone!

BILL. Never mind 'im. Come over 'ere, me dear.

ALF. 'Aven't you got enough already?

(*At this moment MUSTAPHA, with a sweep of his arm, brings the dance to an end, while the musicians strike up a din which causes ALF and BILL acute annoyance.*)

(*At last BILL goes up to ALF and gesticulates fiercely.*)

BILL. Stop it!

ALF (roaring). 'Ow?

(*BILL goes through the motions of rubbing the button. ALF produces the talisman. Instantly the noise ceases and everyone of ALF's retinue falls on his or her face. So do ALF and BILL.*)

ALF (*getting up with a shamefaced air, followed by BILL*). Force of 'abit, Bill. I always take cover when anybody else does.

(*He rubs the button. EUSTACE appears.*)

'Ere, Eustace, what's all this blinkin' noise about, eh? We can't 'ear ourselves think; an' you've nearly busted Mr. Grant's ear-drum.

EUSTACE (*pained*). Lord, this was a concert of music in thine honour such as delighted the ear of the great Haroun al-Raschid.

ALF. Aaron 'oo? Never 'eard of 'im!

BILL (*indicating the still prostrate crowd*). Look 'ere, Alf, 'adn't you better let some o' these poor blighters get up? The blood'll be running into their 'eads something chronic.

ALF (*diffidently*). 'Ere, you can get up now.

(*No one moves.*)

ALF (*in a parade rasp*). SQUAD! On the feet—UP!

(*No one moves.*)

ALF. 'Ere, Eustace—don't the blinkin' 'eathens understand English?

EUSTACE. No, great master. None are there of thy speech among thy slaves. But thy steward (*indicating the prostrate MUSTAPHA, now a shapeless lump on the floor*), he shall be skilled in thy tongue, and through him will these thy servants perform all thy will. His name is Mustapha.

(EUSTACE *makes a pass at MUSTAPHA, who quivers. EUSTACE vanishes.*)

BILL. Somebody'll be 'avin' a fit if you don't do something, Alf.

ALF. Well, what?

BILL. Tell 'im (*indicating MUSTAPHA*).

ALF. What did Eustace say 'is name was?

BILL. Mr. Farr, I think. Something like that. Try it.

ALF. 'Ere, Farr! (*No result.*) Farr! Mr. Farr!

(MUSTAPHA *recognises the name in this form, and stands up.*)

Stand-offish, ain't 'e? Fancy 'avin' to say "Mr." to your own servant. Look 'ere, Farr—Mister Farr—why don't these 'ere lunatics get up?

MUSTAPHA. Verily, great master, they are afraid of thy power.

ALF (*very pleased with himself*). Afraid of me, are they? 'Ear that, Bill? Afraid of me! Well, Farr, you tell 'em it's all right. I don't bear 'em no malice for kickin' up a row.

(MUSTAPHA *says something to them in Arabic. The multi-coloured crowd rises and melts away, and its members go about their business. One of them, a tall and gorgeously-apparelled young woman whose name is ZUBAIDAH, comes to ALF, at MUSTAPHA'S command, and indicates her willingness to obey his special behests. ALF, however, finds her more than a little overpowering, and waves her away. She departs, sorrowful and ashamed at not having found favour in her lord's eyes.*)

BILL (*gazing about him*). Lumme! Looks more like one o' them pantomime palaces than a real 'ouse, don't it?

ALF. Don't seem to be much furniture about.

BILL. That don't matter; it's only Eustace an' 'is old-fashioned ideas—easy change that, later. What I want now's a drink.

(ANIS-AL-JALIS, *a lovely slave, sways gracefully across the hall. BILL accosts her.*)

Get me a pint o' bitter, my dear, will you?

(*She does not understand. He makes a gesture of drinking. She smiles comprehendingly and goes off. BILL watches her with admiration.*)

ALF. Well, that's all right. Now for my Liz. I better walk over to Dunwater Park an' let 'er know we're arrived earlier than we expected.

BILL. Walk? Not much. Ask Eustace to get yer a Rolls-Royce if you must go. But there's no need to waste time that way. Telephone to 'er.

ALF. Good idea. Farr, where's the telephone?

MUSTAPHA (*bewildered*). Master?

BILL (*very loud*). Telephone, you chump.

(ALF *goes through the motions of telephoning, but MUSTAPHA still shakes his head.*)

BILL. Lumme, what a set! Just because Aladdin never 'ad a telephone, I suppose we got to do without. You'll 'ave to send Eustace over to fetch 'er, Alf.

(ALF rubs the button, and EUSTACE appears.)

ALF. Eustace, pop over to Dunwater Park—you know the place—and fetch my girl 'ere. And mind, no error this time. You bring the one I want, Miss Liz Walker, or there'll be trouble. See?

(EUSTACE vanishes.)

Lor, Bill, what a game. I'm all of a doodah with excitement. What a surprise for Liz, eh?

(There is a piercing scream, and LIZ appears. She is in cap and apron, and is still carrying the dust-pan and brush that she was wielding when EUSTACE found her; and she is plainly scared to death. She sees MUSTAPHA and shrinks away.)

LIZ. 'Elp! 'Elp! What's 'appened? Oh, where am I? 'Elp!

ALF. Liz!

LIZ. Alf . . . Alf, save me!

(She rushes to him and he takes her in his arms.)

ALF. It's all right, Liz. Nobody's goin' to 'urt you.

LIZ (looking about her timidly, still clinging to ALF). But where am I? What is this place? And what's that black man 'ere for?

ALF. This place? It's my surprise for you. And that's Mr. Farr. 'E's one of our servants. Kind of butler.

(MUSTAPHA salaams, and LIZ returns the salute nervously.)

'Ere, Farr. Take these away for your mistress.

(ALF hands him the dust-pan and brush. MUSTAPHA takes them gingerly and bears them away.)

LIZ. But what are you doin' 'ere?

ALF. Livin' 'ere. It's ours.

LIZ. Ours?

ALF. Yours and mine.

LIZ. 'Ow can that be?

ALF. I'll tell yer. You see . . .

BILL (who has been hanging about in the offing). Aren't yer goin' to interdooce me, Alf?

ALF. Oh, sorry, Bill. Liz, you've 'eard me say some 'ard things about Bill Grant, 'aven't yer? Well, this is 'im.

LIZ. 'Owjerdo, Mr. Grant. Go on, Alf. What was yco tellin' me?

ALF. You've seen Aladdin in the pantomime? 'Im as 'ad a pet spook? Well, 'is pet spook's my pet spook now. I call 'im Eustace. Whenever I rubs this 'ere button o' mine—like this—up pops Eustace, an' . . .

(EUSTACE appears. LIZ shrieks.)

EUSTACE. What wouldst thou have, great master?

ALF. Oh, sorry, Eustace. I was just showin' the lady 'ow the button worked.

(EUSTACE gazes at LIZ appraisingly.)

LIZ (*in a terrified whisper*). Alf—send it away. Is it the devil?

ALF. It's only old Eustace. Reg'lar friend of the family.

LIZ (*shuddering*). I don't like him.

EUSTACE. O master, verily this maid is not so fair as the other.

LIZ (*jealously*). Other? What other?

ALF (*hastily*). Oh, nothing. That was just a mistake of Eustace's. (*Fiercely to the DJINN.*) 'Op it quick, before you gets me into trouble.

(EUSTACE vanishes. ALF turns to LIZ.)

See? I've only got to tell 'im to do things and 'e does 'em. You can 'ave everything in the world you wants now, Liz. You only got to ask. You can be the finest lady in the land. We'll get you silks and satins and . . .

LIZ (*obstinately*). I b'lieve it's the devil.

ALF. O' course it ain't. D'you think the Old Gentleman'd fetch an' carry for me like Eustace does? It's the same spook as used to do for Aladdin, I tell you. That's why 'e's done the place up like this. We'll make it real 'omey later, when we're settled down a bit. I'll tell yer what, Liz. We'll 'ave the Archbishop of Canterbury in to marry us. That'll prove Eustace ain't the devil, because the devil couldn't muck about with the Archbishop, could 'e?

(*The beautiful slave enters with a large flagon and a goblet, and approaches BILL. He makes her sit on the cushions beside him, where she fills his tankard as fast as he empties it. LIZ regards her askance and makes some obviously unfavourable comment to ALF, who waves it aside.*)

BILL. 'Ave one, Alf? It's the real stuff.

ALF. Not just now.

BILL. All right. Another of the same for me, please, miss.

(*Liz is still unhappy.*)

ALF. Don't you want to marry me, Liz?

LIZ. Of course I do; but it don't seem right to do it like this some'ow. Besides, I've got to give Lady Isobel a month's notice.

ALF. A month's notice? I'll send Farr round with a sackful of bank-notes instead of notice. Month's notice! Why, I've only got a month's leave. You got to remember you're mistress of Denmore Manor now.

LIZ (*jumping to her feet*). That I'm not—nor goin' to be. I don't believe in goin' out of yer station. Alf, I was comin' to warn yer. They're sayin' awful things down in the village about this place.

ALF. What business is it of theirs?

LIZ. Well, Mrs. Rudd—that's the postmistress—thinks it's full of German spies.

BILL (*clasping his lady*). Garn! What is there to spy on round 'ere?

LIZ. An' Mrs. Davies—that's the Vicar's wife—she's written to Lord Dunwater up in London to complain.

ALF. Lord Dunwater?

BILL. You know. Bloke with nice ways.

LIZ. She'll be along 'ere pretty quick, to 'ave a look round. So I warn yer. And I did 'ear Lady Isobel say something about comin' to ask for a Red Cross subscription.

ALF. Lady Isobel? I shouldn't mind that so much.

LIZ. What d'you know about Lady Isobel?

ALF (*confused*). Oh, nothing. I—I seen 'er picture in the paper. In one of them pretty dresses.

LIZ. Oh. Pretty dresses! She never wears anything but uniform now.

ALF. When did she say she was comin'?

LIZ. I dunno. I just 'appened to 'ear 'er fixin' it up like with Lootenant Allen.

ALF } (*together*). Allen?
BILL }

LIZ. Yes. 'E's one of the patients in the 'ospital.

BILL. Tall feller with fair 'air?

ALF. Wounded in the arm?

LIZ. Yes. Old friend of 'er ladyship's. When she sees 'is name in the casualty list, she 'as 'im brought 'ere.

BILL. It's 'im. 'E mustn't see us.

ALF. What's to stop 'im?

LIZ. What's up, Alf? You 'aven't been doin' anything bad, 'ave you?

ALF. N-no. Only we don't want the officers mixin' their-selves up in our little bit o' leave—do we, Bill?

(*Meanwhile MUSTAPHA has approached with a bevy of female slaves. He salaams, trying to attract ALF'S attention.*)

LIZ (*alarmed*). 'Oo's this, Alf?

ALF. Only old Farr again. What's up, Farr?

MUSTAPHA. If my lord permits, thy slaves await thee that they may bathe thee (*an idea which ALF and BILL receive with mirth, but which shocks LIZ profoundly*) and change thy travelling dress for a garment better befitting thy state.

ALF. Civvy clothes? That's a good idea.

BILL. Yes, you get out of uniform an' shave yer moustache off, an' Lootenant Allen'll never know yer. An' I can keep out of 'is way.

ALF. What about the lady? I want you to do 'er proud.

MUSTAPHA. Lord, there is prepared for the gracious lady a robe of surpassing richness. These ladies wait to attend her.

(*Six Ladies of the Harem beckon to LIZ, who hardly knows whether to be more alarmed or shocked.*)

ALF. There, Liz. Now you'll see. This is the last time you'll wear a cap an' apron, me dear.

LIZ. No, it ain't. I'm not stopping 'ere.

ALF. Wodjer mean?

LIZ. What I say. I don't know what you're doin', Alf, but I do know this ain't right. I thought you was comin' back to me the same as before, but you've all changed.

ALF. But I got it all for you, Liz.

LIZ. Well, you can keep it. I don't like it, an' I'm goin'!

ALF. But when are yer comin' back, Liz?

LIZ. Never! (*Then, seeing his unhappy expression, she softens.*) I got a 'oliday because you was comin' 'ome, Alf. I shall be waitin' for yer at mother's—when you come to yer senses . . . And I'd like me dust-pan and brush back, if you please.

(*ALF gives a reluctant order; the dust-pan and brush are brought in with due ceremony by the two negroes and handed over by MUSTAPHA. LIZ departs.*)

ALF (*sitting down dejectedly*). Well, wodjer think o' that, Bill?

BILL. Well, if you asks *me*, I say it's a good riddance. That girl ain't your sort any more now, Alf. You oughter marry a lady.

ALF. Don't start again about yer blinkin' princess. I'm fed up with women, any'ow.

BILL. Well, don't 'ave a princess. 'Ave Lady Isobel. She's a peach, she is.

ALF. Don't talk weak.

BILL. 'Tisn't weak. All you gotter do's go to the old cock, Lord what's-is-name, an' say, "Look 'ere—I'm the richest man in the world, an' I want to marry yer daughter."

ALF (*dully*). Richest man in the world?

BILL. Well, you are, aren't you? As for the girl, you give 'er a few ropes of pearls an' a 'atful o' diamonds, an' she'll eat out of yer 'and. They'll do anything for pearls all 'er sort will.

ALF. Bill, it wasn't my fault, was it? You know, Liz didn't ought to 'ave said what she did, did she?

BILL. Wants a lesson, if you ask me.

(*ALF thinks it over, then shakes his head.*)

ALF. No, Bill. Arter all, Liz is my girl. I got to stick to 'er.

BILL. 'Ow if she don't stick to you?

ALF. I ain't goin' to think about that.

BILL. Oh well, give 'er a little time to see which side 'er bread's buttered, an' she'll come back. An' if she don't, you can always send Eustace to fetch 'er.

ALF. So I can.

BILL. I say, Alf—what yer goin' to call yerself now yer a gentleman? I'm goin' to be Mr. Montmorency.

ALF (*to whom this is quite a new idea*). 'Ow d'yer mean?

BILL. Well, if we're goin' to set up 'ouse in a place like this, we don't want to be goin' about with names like 'Iggins and Grant. 'Sides, somebody might reckernise us. But if I calls meself Montmorency an' you—well, 'ow's "Wentworth" strike yer?

ALF (*impressed*). You are a one! You think of everything. Yes, Wentworth'll do fine. (*Softly to himself.*) Mr. Alfred Wentworth, Esquire!

(*MUSTAPHA approaches with the slaves, ZUBAIDAH at their head.*)

Well, what is it now, Farr?

MUSTAPHA. My lord's bath is prepared.

ALF. Righto, I'm just comin' ! There's one for Mr. Grant too, I 'ope ?

BILL (*with dignity*). Mr. Montmorency.

ALF. Mr. Montmorency, I should 'ave said.

MUSTAPHA. Lord, it is even so.

ALF. Comin', Bill ?

BILL. 'Alf a tick—where's the blinkin' 'urry ? 'Ave a drink with me first. (*He takes his refilled tankard from the beautiful SLAVE.*) This 'ere girl's a fair wonder. She don't understand a word I say, but that don't matter. She just fetches me another every time I finish. Never 'ad such a time in all me little life. Lucy, I'm going to call 'er.

(*He caresses her, and she clasps his legs with a look of adoration.*)

ALF (*scandalised*). If you ask me, Bill Grant . . .

BILL (*parenthetically*). Montmorency—William Montmorency.

ALF (*continuing*). . . . You're makin' a good deal too free with 'er altogether, an' I'll ask you to be 'ave yerself. I believe it was because of 'er that Liz went off like that.

BILL. 'Oo d'yer think yer talkin' to ?

ALF. You.

BILL. Oh, do yer ?

ALF. Yes, I do.

BILL. Well, you can just shut yer fat 'ead—see ? I shall do as I likes.

ALF. Ho, will yer ? I'd 'ave you know it's my 'ouse an' my Button, an' if you don't be 'ave I'll just tell Eustace to take and send you back to the Front, so there.

BILL (*as the seriousness of ALF's threat strikes him*). Lumme, Alf, I was on'y joking.

ALF. Well—you just be 'ave then.

(*ZUBAIDAH leads him off by the hand to the bathroom.*)

BILL. It seems to me, Lucy my girl, that we'll 'ave to be a bit careful.

(*LUCY, uncomprehending, fills his flagon for him.*)

Well, I don't mind if I do. (*He drinks.*)

(*ALF appears from the bathroom, accompanied by ZUBAIDAH, who is trying to unbutton his tunic. He fends her off.*)

ALF. Go away ! I'm surprised at you, Agnes ! Where was you brought up ? Bill, see that girl ?

BILL (*sulkily*). Yes ?

ALF. Trying to undress me.

BILL. An' very nice too.

ALF. I ain't been bathed by a female since my old mother did it when I was a kid, an' I ain't goin' to start now. 'Ere, Mr. Farr, send 'em away, will you? Tell 'em this is to be a "men only" show.

(At MUSTAPHA'S signal, ZUBAIDAH reluctantly departs.)

(Magnanimously.) Good-bye, Agnes. Be a good girl, an' p'r'aps I'll let you brush me 'air arterwards.

BILL *(still sulky)*. Be careful. You don't want to kill 'er with excitement.

ALF *(going back to the bathroom)*. Ain't you comin', Bill?

BILL. No 'urry—I'm quite comfortable.

ALF. Yes, you look it. I s'pose you'd like to be bathed by those girls.

BILL. Well, if they don't mind, I don't see why I should, any'ow.

(ALF goes back to the bathroom, still followed by his attendant ladies.)

(BILL yawns, stretches, and gets up.)

(A SLAVE appears, carrying a suit of gorgeous Eastern clothes, which she carries into the bathroom.)

BILL *(staring)*. Farr, what's that?

MUSTAPHA. A garment for my lord such as was worn by the great prince 'Ala-ad-din on the day of his wedding to the Princess Badralbudoor.

BILL. Lumme!

(Two SLAVES come out of the bathroom, bearing ALF'S khaki uniform reverently. BILL follows them with his eyes.)

An' what about me? D'yer expect me to wear that kind o' tomfoolery?

MUSTAPHA. In truth, there are prepared for thee also garments which will cause thy face to shine as the full glory of the radiant sun.

BILL. Radiant sun be damned. I tell you what it is—Eustace is bein' 'olesale again. It'll 'ave to be stopped.

(At this moment ALF'S voice is heard in great agitation calling "Bill! Bill!") A second later ALF himself appears through the curtains. He is wrapped in a bath-towel, and on his head is the headpiece of the Oriental costume you saw borne in by the slave. He is carrying another portion of it in his hand. ZUBAIDAH follows.)

ALF. Look 'ere, Bill ! They've pinched me clothes an' given me these blue satin bloomers to wear ! I say, Farr, 'aven't you got any proper civvies for me ?

MUSTAPHA. Lord, in thy robing-room are stored garments of every kind. If these meet not my lord's favour, then this thy slave shall show thee others.

ALF (*regarding ZUBAIDAH with dislike*). Oh, will she ? 'Ere, Bill—you can 'ave 'er.

(*He departs.*)

MUSTAPHA (*to BILL*). Will my lord's most illustrious friend take his bath also ?

BILL. All right, if I can take the jug with me. Good-bye, Lucy, for the present.

(*He disappears with his jug into the bathroom. There is a ring at the hall door. The NEGROES fling open the door, and the VICAR and MRS. DAVIES are on the step.*)

MRS. DAVIES (*shrinking back*). My goodness ! *Blacks ! !*

(*The NEGROES invite them by gesture to enter. They do so, MRS. DAVIES very much shocked by the slaves.*)

(*MUSTAPHA goes to meet them.*)

VICAR. Er—is Mr.—er—that is . . .

MUSTAPHA. Enter, O merchant ; thou, and the woman with thee.

MRS. DAVIES. Woman, indeed ! What impertinence ! Julian, are you going to stand by and see me insulted by a black man ?

MUSTAPHA. Tarry here, O merchant, until my lord be informed of thy coming hither.

(*He goes in search of ALF.*)

VICAR. I wonder why he keeps on calling me a merchant.

MRS. DAVIES (*who has been looking about her*). Julian ! Are we dreaming ? Just look at the place !

VICAR. It's very impressive, Hermia. Quite like the Arabian nights. I wonder if some Indian prince has taken a fancy to live here in the style to which he is accustomed, and . . .

MRS. DAVIES. Indian prince, indeed ! Some horrible profiteer, *I* should say. Do you think I don't know an imitation when I see it ?

(*MUSTAPHA re-enters and signals to FEMALE SLAVES, who approach the stairs.*)

MUSTAPHA. O merchant, my lord bids me greet thee, and prays that thou wilt await his coming; for he is freshly from the bath. As for the woman, it is fitting that she be taken into the women's quarters, to the harem, that my lord may see her and appraise her worth.

(*The FEMALE SLAVES gather round MRS. DAVIES.*)

MRS. DAVIES. What's this? What do you want, you shameless hussies? How dare you touch me? Go away and get some clothes on! . . . Do you hear me? Take your hands off me and go away. . . . Let me go, woman! . . . Julian! . . . Julian!!

(*She breaks away from the girls and joins her husband.*)

VICAR (*upset*). My dear Hermia!

MRS. DAVIES (*furiously*). Julian, this is no place for me, or for you either. Take me home at once! I insist on being taken home at once.

VICAR (*mildly*). But really, Hermia, I am sure these young ladies meant no harm. The customs of the East . . .

MRS. DAVIES. East, indeed! Hussies from the stage, most likely.

(*ALF enters on the gallery. He has shaved off his moustache and has put on a morning suit. He is at once proud of his magnificence and dismayed by it.*)

(*MRS. DAVIES turns round and sees him.*)

MRS. DAVIES. Thank goodness, there's *one* white man, anyhow. You are the butler, I suppose. Is your master in?

ALF. Yes'm. . . . I'm . . . that is, 'e's . . . er—I'm 'im.

MRS. DAVIES (*not taking it in*). Well, will you kindly tell him . . .

VICAR (*realising*). My dear, this *is* Mr.—er . . . (*To ALF.*) My name is Davies. Er—my wife—I have called to —er —the Manor pew—er . . .

ALF. Sit down, sir. Won't the lady take a chair? That is a—er—cushion?

MRS. DAVIES. I will not. I am shocked and astonished at the way I have been treated. If you are responsible, Mr. — Mr. . . .

ALF. 'Ig . . . Wentworth!

VICAR (*mildly*). Really, my dear, Mr. Higg-Wentworth can hardly be blamed for an error on the part of his —er—his —er —(*decides he won't risk a guess*)—of an inmate of his household. I am sure the—ah—the young lady acted under a pure misapprehension. (*He beams.*)

MRS. DAVIES. It is disgraceful, and their clothing is nothing short of immodest. Please send them away at once.

ALF. Send 'em away, Farr.

(MUSTAPHA gives an order. The GIRLS rise, bow low to ALF, and depart.)

(MRS. DAVIES averts her eyes, but the VICAR gazes after them, a trifle wistfully.)

MUSTAPHA. Lord, it was supposed that this merchant had brought the woman hither in order to sell her unto thee as a slave.

MRS. DAVIES (outraged). WHAT?

MUSTAPHA (continuing unmoved). But, indeed, she is of little worth. For behold, she is lean and ill-favoured, and of evil passions. . . .

MRS. DAVIES (in a terrible voice, which quells even MUSTAPHA). Hold your tongue, man.

(She moves towards the door in a fury, ALF following in feeble protest.)

ALF. I'm sure, ma'am . . .

MRS. DAVIES. You need say no more. I have heard quite enough. But let me tell you, Mr. Higg-Wentworth, or whatever you call yourself, you have not heard the last of this, nor those shameless undressed women of yours. You cannot do this kind of thing in a law-abiding English village.

ALF. S'welp me, I . . .

MRS. DAVIES. Be silent! Lord Dunwater returns to-morrow, and he will soon see that your goings-on are stopped. Come, Julian!

VICAR (sure there is a mistake somewhere). But . . .

MRS. DAVIES. Come, Julian!

(The VICAR follows her apologetically out. They disappear into the drive, leaving the front door open behind them.)

(BILL, dressed now as a squire of low degree, and very pleased with himself, enters the gallery with LUCY.)

ALF (wiping his brow). Lumme!

BILL (coming downstairs). 'Oo was that ole girl? She seemed a bit cross, some'ow. What's the matter?

ALF. These blinkin' 'eathens an' their silly ways again. That was the parson's wife, an' a fair terror. An' what must that idjit Farr do but make 'er think we're runnin' an Abode of Love. She's going to get Lord Dunwater to fire us out.

(MUSTAPHA *has moved away out of earshot and is now giving orders to some of the SLAVES.*)

BILL. 'E can't, can 'e?

ALF. P'r'aps not. But it ain't goin' to make it very nice for us if that ole woman goes about spreadin' stories about us. I wish we could stop 'er mouth!

BILL. Well, we can.

ALF. 'Ow?

BILL (*calmly*). Easy enough. Strike 'er dumb.

ALF. Eh?

BILL. Tell Eustace to make 'er dumb. Then she *can't* tell anything.

ALF (*after a pause*). She could write it.

BILL. Then paralyse 'er.

ALF. That wouldn't do us no good. If 'er an' the parson came 'ere an' then both went dumb an' paralysed—well, the neighbour'ood 'ud be sure to notice it, wouldn't they?

BILL. I know! Tell Eustace to fix 'em just so's they can't talk or write anything about us. 'Ow's that for a scheme? But it don't really matter. If we get into a 'ole, Eustace can always pull us out.

(*A motor-horn is heard.*)

BILL (*peeping round the corner*). It's 'er—Lady Isobel. And she's got Lootenant Allen with 'er. I'm off. 'E mustn't see us together.

(ALF *gazes unhappily at the door*. BILL *bolts, choosing the gallery way.*)

BILL (*over his shoulder as he goes*). Mind you show 'er 'ow rich you are.

(MUSTAPHA *and the NEGROES proceed to the door to admit LADY ISOBEL and ALLEN. They come forward into the hall, looking about them in bewilderment.*)

LADY ISOBEL. I hope you will excuse me, Mr.—er—

ALF (*getting it right this time*). Wentworth.

LADY ISOBEL. Mr. Wentworth, for bursting in upon you like this. I am Lady Isobel Fitz Peter. This is Mr. Allen.

(ALF *shakes hands nervously, afraid of being recognised, but ALLEN hardly looks at him. He is examining the transformed house. LADY ISOBEL sits down on a heap of cushions.*)

I'm afraid I've come to you as a beggar, Mr. Wentworth.

ALF. A beggar, miss—my lady?

LADY ISOBEL. Yes. I'm collecting for a Red Cross hospital they're starting at Anston. It's such a good object and they do need funds so badly—and I wondered—would you be so kind—anything will do. . . . (*She breaks off and concludes with a brilliant smile.*)

(*ALF realises that fate is playing into his hands.*)

ALF. Money? O' course, me lady. Farr, go an' get some money.

(*MUSTAPHA, who has been gazing at LADY ISOBEL with increasing satisfaction since her arrival, departs joyfully.*)

LADY ISOBEL. You have been in the East, I suppose, Mr. Wentworth.

ALF. I have been to Yarmouth.

LADY ISOBEL. Ah, yes. But I mean the Orient. Egypt—Persia—India.

ALF. Oh! (*He fidgets uncomfortably.*) You're thinkin' about this 'ouse. (*He waves an arm round.*) Well, I can't say as I was ever in them parts meself like, but them as did the 'ouse up comes from there, an' I 'ad it all brought over regardless.

LADY ISOBEL. Really! That must have been very difficult in war-time.

ALF (*loftily*). Oh, I only got to ask. 'Ow d'yer like it, miss?

LADY ISOBEL. Well, it's all very magnificent.

(*MUSTAPHA re-enters, followed by six FEMALE SLAVES in bright garments. LADY ISOBEL and ALLEN exchange glances.*)

Oh, what lovely dresses!

(*Each SLAVE carries a bulky bag. MUSTAPHA lays a cloth on the ground before ALLEN, and makes a sign to the first SLAVE, who approaches and pours out the contents of her bag—a stream of gold coins. She retires.*)

(*ALLEN, LADY ISOBEL and ALF all stare in amazement too deep for words.*)

(*MUSTAPHA, taking their silence to mean that the sum is not large enough, signs to the second SLAVE. She in turn pours out her bagful and retires.*)

ALLEN. But we—we can't take this. You know we can't. Why, it's gold!

ALF. I know, sir. It's a mistake. 'Ere, Farr, what's the meaning of this?

MUSTAPHA (*with enthusiasm*). Indeed, master, if thou didst offer to this merchant all the gold that is in the six bags, it would not be an over-payment ; for verily mine eyes have not looked upon so fair a slave.

LADY ISOBEL (*realising MUSTAPHA'S meaning with amusement*). Heavens ! He thinks I'm for sale !

ALLEN (*angrily*). Yes, confound him, he does. Not much doubt about the Oriental there. While as for hoarding gold . . .

ALF. S'welp me, sir, I never knew 'e 'ad it, I swear I didn't. 'Ere, Farr, this won't do, you know !

MUSTAPHA. Lord, this is but the smallest part of the riches that lie heaped in thy treasury, the full extent whereof no man may count. Therefore chaffer not with this merchant, but pay him whatsoever he asks ; for in truth the maid is passing fair. Her lips . . .

ALLEN (*furiously*). That'll be about enough from you.

(MUSTAPHA *retreats in alarm. At the sound of his late commander's voice, raised in anger, ALF springs to attention ; but his lapse is not noticed.*)

ALF (*to MUSTAPHA*). 'Ere, take that stuff back where it came from. An' look 'ere, Farr, you got to get every last farthing o' gold in the place changed into notes. An' if I catch any more 'oardin' goin' on . . .

(MUSTAPHA *departs, still mystified. ALF turns to LADY ISOBEL and ALLEN.*)

If you'll wait 'ere a moment, miss, and sir, I'll get it you in notes.

LADY ISOBEL. Thank you so much.

(ALF *goes off. ALLEN follows him curiously with his eyes.*)

What an extraordinary place, Denis.

ALLEN. What an extraordinary bit of work that Wentworth is.

LADY ISOBEL. D'you know, I rather like him. There's something about him that appeals to me. Something childlike.

ALLEN. Are you thinking of adopting him ?

LADY ISOBEL. Don't be ridiculous.

ALLEN. D'you know, I'm sure I've seen that chap somewhere before, or someone like him. It struck me when he walked out then.

LADY ISOBEL. That's funny. I've got that feeling too. Who can it be, that we both know ?

ALLEN. Wait a bit ! It's coming to me ! Why, of course, I've got it. But it's nobody *you* know, Isobel. If he had a moustache, Wentworth'd be the living image of a silly ass in my platoon, Higgins by name ; and so . . . I say, what's the matter ?

LADY ISOBEL. Higgins ! (*She clutches ALLEN's sleeve.*) Tell me, had you *really* a man in your platoon called Higgins ?

ALLEN. Yes—but why . . . ?

LADY ISOBEL. And is he *really* like this Wentworth man ?

ALLEN. Yes ; but you can't have seen him.

LADY ISOBEL. Only—only in a dream.

ALLEN. *What ?*

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, I know it must sound mad to you ; but I had the most dreadfully vivid dream all about being at the front. I was being shown round by a couple of Tommies—I'd always said I'd wanted to see the trenches, you know. One of the two Tommies *was* just like this Wentworth, and his name was Higgins. The other's name was--wait a bit—oh yes, Grant. And then you came into it and . . .

ALLEN. *Grant ?* Why, it must have been . . . Isobel, shall I tell you what you said to me when I found you there ?

(LADY ISOBEL *clutches his arm and nods.*)

You said, " It's a dream. It *must* be a dream."

(*She nods again, and leans against him for support. He puts his arm round her and continues.*)

Then—then you disappeared. I thought I must have been seeing things, but . . . but . . .

LADY ISOBEL. But it was real. I *knew* it was, somehow. That's why I began to do some real war-work. That's why I had you brought here. Denis—what does it all mean ?

ALLEN (*gently*). Mean ? My darling, what can it mean but—this.

(ALLEN *takes her in his arms. Their lips meet. Some seconds later, ALF's voice is heard in the distance admonishing some menial. They spring apart.*)

I'll wait for you in the car.

(*He hurries out. ALF reappears with a little sheaf of bank-notes in his hand. This he hands to LADY ISOBEL with a casual air.*)

ALF. There, me lady. A little something for your 'orsepital.

LADY ISOBEL. Thank you so much. It's most awfully generous of you. . . . (*She glances at the notes she is holding and her eyes widen. Then she offers them back to ALF.*) Surely there's some mistake!

ALF (*delighted at the success of his coup*). Quite all right, miss.

LADY ISOBEL. But—but these are thousand-pound notes. I really couldn't allow you to . . .

ALF (*earnestly*). If you please, miss, I should be much obliged if you'd take it.

LADY ISOBEL (*offering the notes again to ALF*). Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Wentworth, but really, it's quite impossible . . .

ALF. I can spare it easy. Ten thousand is nothing to me, I give you my word. If you'd just take it to oblige me, like, I shall be much obliged.

LADY ISOBEL. But I don't understand why you should want to do this.

ALF (*very uncomfortable, shifting from foot to foot*). I'd like to feel that you'd 'ad it, miss. I'd take it as a real favour.

LADY ISOBEL (*realising that he intends a personal compliment to herself, very gently*). Mr. Wentworth, I couldn't possibly take all that money from anyone. It is far more than the hospital needs, and there are other things which want money so badly. But I will take these, and thank you most *tremendously*! (*She takes the two top notes.*)

ALF. I wish you'd 'ave the lot, miss.

LADY ISOBEL. And you must come over to see us as soon as ever you can spare the time. Come to lunch to-morrow, won't you? Or come to dinner.

ALF. It's imperial to me.

LADY ISOBEL. Dinner, then. Quite an informal hospital show, you know. My father will want to thank you properly.

ALF (*scared at the idea of such a meeting with the Provost Marshal*). I don't want yer father . . . I mean, I don't want no farther thanks!

LADY ISOBEL (*as she goes*). You know, you'll love my father!

ALF (*privately*). You bet!

(LADY ISOBEL goes; and BILL, who has evidently been waiting till the coast was clear, instantly appears.)

BILL. Well, did Lieutenant Allen reckernise yer?

ALF. No more than nothing. And she's asked me to go an' 'ave dinner with 'er an' the Earl to-morrow. Bill, I've clicked!

BILL (*coming downstairs—contemptuously*). Well, o' course you've clicked! What did I tell yer? All alike, 'er sort is. Show 'em enough money, an' they'll follow you like cats arter

fish. (*He arrives at the foot of the stairs, and continues his remarks from the middle of the room.*) Considerin' as you'd just give 'er two thousand pounds, I wender she didn't ask you to stop the night. 'Ow did she like the place?

ALF. I don't know. Wish I did. Bill, d'you know, my ole mother always says you can tell when a girl wants to marry a bloke, because she always wants to arrange 'is furniture for 'im. And Liz 'asn't said a word about furniture.

BILL. Oh, girls is made contrary and interferin'. Don't you worry about Liz. You remembered to tell Eustace about the parson's wife, I 'ope?

ALF. Yes. More'n that. I told 'im to fix it so's neither 'er nor 'er 'usband can say a word against us. Then they can't go mischief-makin'. That was a good idea of yours, Bill.

BILL. Yes. I don't know where you'd be without me, Alf. If you ask me, I think *I'd* better work the Button in future.

(*ALF gives a scornful laugh.*)

When are we goin' to 'ave something to eat? The walls of my stummick's fair sticking together with emptiness.

ALF. Farr! Dinner!

MUSTAPHA. Lord, thy banqueting robes are prepared.

ALF. Banqueting robes, Bill! What next?

(*ALF and BILL go off, while MUSTAPHA and the female slaves prepare the hall for a banquet. Then ALF reappears, in a brilliant Eastern costume.*)

ALF. Bill! Bill! Look at this!

(*Rather pleased with himself than otherwise, he does a few steps of what he fondly imagines to be an Eastern dance. BILL enters, similarly transformed, and regards him caustically.*)

BILL. Think you're a dancing girl, I suppose!

(*The slaves appear in full strength, bringing food, which they deposit on the floor; they depart. LUCY appears with her flagon.*)

Lumme, what a spread!

ALF. Enough to feed a couple of platoons.

BILL *sitting down beside LUCY*). Well, I've no complaints.

ALF. I 'ave. I want my Liz.

BILL. Well, send Eustace for 'er.

ALF. I will!

(*He rubs the button. EUSTACE appears.*)

Eustace, fetch my Liz.

EUSTACE. Lord, she is here, fitted for thy feast!

(*He waves his arms, and Liz appears. She is in gorgeous Eastern robes, and is covered with a veil. She is in a kind of momentary trance.*)

ALF. Blimey, Liz, is that you ?

LIZ (*waking suddenly to a realisation of her whereabouts, and examining her scanty clothes with growing horror*). You may well ask, Alf 'Iggins ! Look what they done to me—an' I'm a good girl, I am ! (*In her anger she flings the veil from her, and stands revealed.*)

BILL. Well, I think it's very pretty.

LIZ (*padding across to him in her scandalous bare feet*). You would ! I s'pose this is what you learnt in that 'orrible France. Now I know what that devil of yours meant when 'e talked about others.

ALF. But, Liz—it's all a mistake.

LIZ. Yes—your mistake. But I've done with yer, d'yer'ear ? Let me go, or I'll 'ave the law on yer.

ALF. Aren't you goin' to marry me, Liz ?

LIZ. I wouldn't marry yer now if you was the last man on earth. Mormon !

ALF. Oh, well—take 'er 'ome again, Eustace !

(*EUSTACE waves his arms—LIZ vanishes.*)

Bill, she's turned me down.

BILL. Well, that settles it. It's Lady Isobel you got to think about now. The best thing you can do about Liz is forget 'er.

ALF. Forget 'er ! I like that. I only wish I could forget 'er. But I don't suppose even old Eustace could make me do that.

(*EUSTACE, behind, looks up with a joyful expression and makes a pass towards ALF, who puts his hand to his head suddenly.*)

ALF. My 'ead feels all funny . . . What was we talkin' about, Bill ?

BILL. About Liz.

ALF. Liz ? Who's Liz ?

BILL. Lor ! Eustace 'as done it !

ALF. But what was you sayin', Bill ?

BILL. That you oughter marry Lady Isobel.

ALF. Lady Isobel ? Well, so I would if I could. She's a peach !

BILL. An' what about the other girl ?

ALF. Other girl ? Bill, what is the matter with you ? There is no other girl.

BILL. Good old Alf. That's the spirit !

ALF. D'yer think Eustace could work it so's she'd ever marry me?

BILL. 'Course 'e could. 'E'd be glad to. Arter all, it was 'im as picked 'er out for you at first. Well—are you on?

ALF. 'Course I'm on!

BILL. Good lad. 'Ere, Farr—get some more drink. Fetch the girls 'ere.

(The slaves stream in, chattering excitedly, though obviously without any very clear idea what all the fuss is about.)

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you a toast. “'Ere's to Lady Isobel and the future Lord Isobel Fitz-'Iggins!”

(As the curtain descends, he snatches a handful of rose leaves from a bowl held by one of the attendants, and scatters them over the self-conscious ALF after the manner of confetti.)

ACT III

You have before you once more the big hall at Denmore Manor, but it has been changed in several details since you saw it yesterday. ALF, in the interval, has been doing his best to introduce into EUSTACE'S exclusively Oriental scheme a touch of "homeyness." The original hangings and colours remain, but they have been reinforced by solid mid-Victorian furniture—plush-covered chairs and sofas, clumsy and top-heavy sideboards, draped mirrors, lace curtains. The priceless Persian rugs have been supplemented by mats of hot black fur. A stuffed bird in a glass case stands in every likely spot. The walls have been covered with a selection of coloured plates from Christmas supplements.

(In the centre of the hall, in two deep easy-chairs, recline ALF and BILL at their ease. By the side of each stands an inlaid stool, bearing an enormous silver flagon, with a tankard beside it. BILL is dressed in a red and black blazer, white trousers, and white canvas shoes. The faithful LUCY lies curled up at his feet.)

(ALF has on a sports coat in a startling check; and trousers and shoes like BILL'S. All seems peace and joy; and when the curtain rises the dancing girls are performing a gay measure to the music of a concertina and mouth-organ twiddled by ALF and BILL respectively. The dance concluded, the slaves group themselves about the two men; and two negroes, stationed behind ALF, begin to swing two heavy fans to and fro. BILL looks about him, sighs luxuriously, and speaks.)

BILL. Bit of all right, eh? The place's beginning to look a bit like 'ome now.

(ALF merely grunts non-committally.)

I don't think we've done so badly in the time. Thirty-six hours ago we was in France, an' now look! No more worries for either of us.

ALF *(turning up his coat-collar as the fans begin to get into their swing)*. I can't 'elp thinking of what we did to that parson's wife.

BILL. What about 'er? We've stopped 'er mouth all right. *She can't do us no 'arm.*

ALF. I 'ope not. But you know what Eustace *is*—slapdash an' 'olesale. There's no knowin' what 'e mayn't 'ave done to 'er by now.

BILL (*breezily*). That'll be all right.

(BILL *waves a hand towards* LUCY.)

There's a girl for you, now! I'm thinkin' of marrying Lucy, I am. She's just what I wants in a wife. She can't answer me back, an' the more beer I drinks the better she seems to like it. What with you as good as married to Lady Isobel, seems we're both goin' to be family men soon. . . . 'Ere, what's the matter?

ALF (*shivering*). There's the 'ell of a draught round 'ere somewhere!

(*He turns and sees the cause of his discomfort, and dismisses negroes and slaves with a gesture, which MUSTAPHA interprets by a sharp command. The slaves depart.*)

ALF. Talking of Lady Isobel, I 'aven't given Mr. Farr 'is orders yet. Farr! Mr. Farr! Come 'ere a minute. (*Sits up in his chair.*)

MUSTAPHA (*approaching and bowing*). Lord, what wouldst thou have?

ALF. Look 'ere—you remember the lady as came 'ere yesterday with a gentleman?

MUSTAPHA. Verily there were *two*, O master—an old woman of little value, and a fair young slave in strange garments whom the angry merchant would not sell even for a great price.

ALF. Oh, lor, Bill, listen to that! Just listen to 'im. 'E *still* thinks Mr. Allen brought Lady Isobel 'ere to sell 'er to me. I *arsks* yer!

BILL. Blinkin' fool!

ALF. Lumme, think of the bricks 'e might 'ave dropped if I 'adn't 'appened to speak of it! Now, listen 'ere, Mustapha! The lady ain't a slave at all. We don't 'ave slaves, not in decent countries, like this 'ere. She's a *lady*—see? You knows what a lady is, I 'ope?

MUSTAPHA. A woman, O master.

ALF. Woman! You try callin' 'er a woman an' you'll get into trouble—see? She's not a woman (*sees MUSTAPHA's puzzled expression and checks himself*) . . . that is, at least, in a manner o' speaking she is, o' course. . . . But, any'ow, you see, the fact is . . .

BILL (*turning round and cutting the tangle that ALF is weaving about himself*). The fact is, Farr, she's a --a kind of princess --see ?

MUSTAPHA (*appalled at the solecism he has committed*). A princess ?

ALF (*relieved*). That's it, a princess. An' I'm goin' to marry her, see ? So don't let's 'ave any more talk about slaves.

MUSTAPHA (*falling on his knees*). O Lord of Might, be not angry with the least of thy servants. Truly the ways of this land are strange indeed, that a princess should come hither alone and without her women ! Let thine anger be assuaged, O possessor of mercy . . .

ALF (*affably*). All right, old man. Get up. Nobody's goin' to eat you. Look 'ere, I'm goin' to 'ave a--a banquet with 'er father the--er--the King of Dunwater to-night. I shall 'ave to start in 'arf an hour.

MUSTAPHA. Lord, all shall be prepared.

ALF. Right !

(MUSTAPHA bows, and goes to make his arrangements.)

BILL. 'Adn't yer better be dressin' for yer dinner-party ?

ALF. Can't I go like this ?

BILL. Naow !

ALF. What must I 'ave, then ?

BILL. Evenin' dress, o' course.

ALF. I couldn't, Bill. I sh'd feel so silly !

BILL. Sooner you get used to it the better, then. We'll 'ave to wear it every evenin' now. We got a position to keep up.

ALF. Are *you* goin' to ?

BILL. 'Course I am. I know what's expected o' me--Mr. Montmorency ! Nice you'd look when you're married to Lady Isobel, sitting down to supper with 'er in 'er diamonds and pearls an' one o' them low dresses, an' you got up like Brighton beach.

(*He waves a contemptuous hand at ALF's clothes.*)

ALF (*yielding*). Well, I s'pose you knows best, Bill.

BILL. You can bet yer life on that.

(*A motor-horn is heard.*)

ALF. What's this ? Lumme, Bill, it's Lady Isobel an' Lootenant Allen back again. What can they want ?

BILL. I dunno. Go an' get dressed, quick. As for me, I'm off.

(He starts up the stairs.)

ALF. No, Bill. You got to stay an' keep Lootenant Allen busy while I talks to Lady Isobel.

BILL. Don't be an idjit! D'yer want us to be reckernised?

ALF. You won't be. I'll get Eustace to give yer a moustache.

BILL *(in great scorn)*. A moustache—ho, will yer! I likes that!

(The door bell rings, and they disappear, arguing the point. The door is opened to admit LADY ISOBEL and DENIS ALLEN. They enter, and stand transfixed.)

LADY ISOBEL. Denis!

ALLEN. What?

LADY ISOBEL. Look at the furniture!

ALLEN. I was!

(They catch one another's eye, and laugh.)

LADY ISOBEL *(sitting down)*. I do think Daddy's an old pig to mess things up like this, don't you?

ALLEN. I can't go about calling generals pigs, you know. I should be shot, or something.

LADY ISOBEL. Well, he *is* a pig. How am I to explain to poor little Mr. Wentworth that Daddy won't have him in the house at any price?

ALLEN. You'll tell one of the usual polite lies, I suppose.

LADY ISOBEL. I shall have to. Daddy's so unreasonable. I told him all about our visit and that Mr. Wentworth was quite all right, but he said he preferred to see for himself. I think being in the Military Police is very bad for his character. He never used to be like this. . . . You didn't tell him about *us* in the train to-day, did you?

ALLEN. No. I thought I'd tackle him to-night, after dinner. I say, how ripping to see you out of uniform again.

LADY ISOBEL. I've put my best frock on in your honour.

ALLEN. Let's have a look at it!

LADY ISOBEL. Not after driving in the car—I'm all untidy. Wait till we get home. . . . Did you get *it*?

ALLEN. I did.

(He produces a ring from his pocket and slips it on to her finger.)

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, how lovely! And it fits beautifully.

(ALF appears above. *He is in evening dress ; but as neither he nor EUSTACE knows very much about the correct fashions for men, the total effect is hardly happy. He, however, entertains no misgivings, but comes jauntily down the stairs. LADY ISOBEL, concealing her feelings as a lady should, steps forward to meet him.*)

LADY ISOBEL. Mr. Wentworth, I'm so awfully sorry to have to say it, but we shall have to put off your visit till another day. My father—he's—er—he's not very well. In fact, I've had to send him to bed—er—with a chill.

ALF. Don't mention it, me lady. Only sorry to 'ear yer father's not well. Will you 'ave something to drink ? Farr, go an' fetch some o' them fancy drinks—you know, cocktails.

(MUSTAPHA departs on his errand. BILL appears, also in evening dress, and disguised in a huge moustache. *He pauses irresolutely on the stairs, as if meditating flight.*)

(Cutting off his retreat). 'Ullo, Bill—come on down. Allow me to introduce my pal Mr. Montmorency—my lady and sir.

BILL. 'Ow do, mate !

ALLEN (*looking hard at him*). How d'you do ? I say, haven't we met before ?

BILL (*backing, and involuntarily feeling his moustache*). I don't think so.

ALLEN. You remind me of someone.

BILL (*doing his best*). P'raps we met in—in the saloon bar at Monte Carlo.

ALLEN. I'm afraid I've never been there ! (*He turns suddenly to ALF.*) I've never met *you* before, I suppose ?

ALF. Oh, no, sir.

ALLEN. You're sure ?

ALF. No, sir—that is, yessir. Quite sure, sir.

ALLEN. Oh, well, I must have been mistaken.

ALF. } (*together; in great relief*). Yes, sir.
BILL. }

ALLEN turns away. *But his suspicions have evidently not been altogether allayed, for he watches ALF and BILL covertly.*)

(*For the moment, however, a diversion occurs. LORD DUNWATER enters unannounced. He is a dapper little man with a white moustache, very smart in the uniform of a Brigadier-General. He has a brisk and peremptory manner, which goes well with the uniform, but is really rather foreign to his nature. At all events, it quite fails to impress his daughter. He looks about*

him with a surprise which is quickly swallowed up in his indignation at seeing LADY ISOBEL.)

LADY ISOBEL. Daddy !

LORD DUNWATER. Isobel, what are you doing here ? And why did you take the car ? I've had to walk.

LADY ISOBEL (*trying to carry it off*). What are you doing here, Daddy ? You oughtn't to have got up, you know.

LORD DUNWATER. Got up . . . ?

LADY ISOBEL (*quickly*). Yes, I've just been explaining to Mr. Wentworth that you couldn't have him to dinner because you'd got a chill.

(She signs to him to back her up, but he ignores her pointedly.)

LORD DUNWATER. Chill ? Nonsense ! I was never better in my life. You had no right to come here after what I said. Allen, I'm surprised at you for allowing it.

ALLEN (*withering under this unexpected attack*). Me, sir ? I . . . I . . .

LADY ISOBEL. That's not fair. As if Denis could stop me coming.

LORD DUNWATER. Well, go home. I want to explain to this gentleman exactly why I cannot ask him to dinner.

LADY ISOBEL. Mr. Wentworth, may I introduce my father ?

(ALF gives an uneasy nod, which LORD DUNWATER barely acknowledges.)

I'm sure Mr. Wentworth will be pleased to tell you anything you want to ask him.

BILL. Sir—me lord—if it's the Vicar's wife 'as been saying anything against us, she called 'ere yesterday an' went away perfectly satisfied.

ALF. Yes, sir. She won't 'ave a word to say against us.

LADY ISOBEL. There !

LORD DUNWATER (*beginning to weaken*). Of course, if that's so, it puts a different complexion on matters. But I must speak to Mrs. Davies. Come along, Isobel.

(MUSTAPHA has brought the cocktails.)

ALF. Will you 'ave a drink, me lord ?

LORD DUNWATER. No, thank you.

LADY ISOBEL (*quickly*). May I, Mr. Wentworth ?

(She takes one, as do ALLEN, ALF and BILL.)

LORD DUNWATER (*in a kind of comic despair*). Who would be a father!

(*His eye, falling on the goblet from which LADY ISOBEL is drinking, suddenly gleams with the fanatical light which marks the true collector.*)

Good Heavens!

ALLEN. What is it, sir?

LORD DUNWATER. This goblet. It's the finest specimen of Persian filigree work I have ever seen.

LADY ISOBEL. Daddy's a collector, you know, Mr. Wentworth.

ALF. Well, me lord, if you'd like a set o' goblets like this 'ere, I'd be only too 'appy to give you them.

LORD DUNWATER. But it's impossible. You should not put such temptation in a man's way. Why, they're priceless!

ALF. I assure you, sir, I got more o' them than I knows what to do with. Farr, go an' get a dozen o' them mugs for 'is lordship.

(MUSTAPHA goes.)

ALLEN (*examining his goblet*). That's funny!

LORD DUNWATER. What?

ALLEN. I've got a mug something like this that I bought at the front—under rather curious circumstances!

(*He fixes ALF with an eye which is now more suspicious than ever.*

ALF *wilts*. Fortunately, MUSTAPHA's re-entry with the goblets covers his confusion.)

ALF. Put 'em in 'is lordship's car.

LORD DUNWATER. My dear sir, this is the most amazing generosity. I'll tell you what—you must come to dinner with me, and see some of *my* stuff.

(LADY ISOBEL *tactfully refrains from commenting except by her expression—on this volte-face.*)

ALF. Won't you all stay an' 'ave dinner here with us, sir, and 'ave a look round the 'ouse? It's all full of things—I don't know what all they 'aven't put in it.

LADY ISOBEL. But it's such short notice. What would your cook say?

ALF. Short notice? If there's one thing we don't care about in this 'ouse, it's short notice. Mr. Farr, 'er ladyship, is lordship and Mr. Allen's all goin' to stop to dinner!

(MUSTAPHA *claps his hands, and six female slaves come forward to LADY ISOBEL and, with low bows, entreat her in pantomime to go with them.*)

LADY ISOBEL. Am I being invited to powder my nose, Mr. Wentworth?

ALF. That's the idea, me lady. An' if they don't look after you proper, just you tell me.

LADY ISOBEL (*moving off under escort*). Good Heavens, I feel like royalty.

ALF (*privately*). I feel like 'ell! (*He turns to LORD DUNWATER.*) P'raps you wouldn't mind, sir, goin' round the 'ouse with Mr. Montmorency? I'll wait for Lady Isobel.

LORD DUNWATER. I'm sure I'll be delighted, if it isn't asking too much of Mr. Montmorency's kindness.

BILL (*seeing a chance of avoiding too close contact with ALLEN*). Not 'arf! (*Recollects his company manners with a jerk.*) Er—charmed, I'm shaw. This way, me lord.

(ALLEN, *to judge by his glance towards the women's quarters, also intends to wait for LADY ISOBEL.*)

(ALF, *however, plucks up courage to oust him.*)

ALF. Will you go too, sir? I'll wait for the lady.

ALLEN (*hesitating*). Oh—er—thanks! (*Sees there is nothing else for it, and joins the others, much to BILL's chagrin.*)

(ALF, *left alone, waits with his eyes on the women's quarters; and after a moment LADY ISOBEL appears attended by a slave who carries her cloak and by MUSTAPHA. She is resplendent in the most beautiful of evening frocks.*)

(ALF *stands gaping at LADY ISOBEL in wonder, struck "all of a heap."*)

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, Mr. Wentworth—what a perfectly wonderful place that is.

ALF. I—I 'opes they looked arter you properly.

LADY ISOBEL. As if I were a princess in a fairy-tale. I felt that if I'd given them half a chance they'd have bathed me in asses' milk in that wonderful marble bath. I felt very much tempted to let them. (*Notices ALF's stare and looks at her frock apprehensively.*) Is anything wrong?

ALF (*coming to himself*). I'm sorry, miss. I couldn't 'elp staring. You just knocked me.

(*Parenthetically to MUSTAPHA, who is standing by and gazing at LADY ISOBEL with great satisfaction.*)

I'll knock *you* if you don't get out !

(MUSTAPHA *departs hastily.*)

LADY ISOBEL. How nice of you !

ALF. You looks like what you said—a princess out of a fairy-tale.

LADY ISOBEL. It is a pretty frock, isn't it ?

(LORD DUNWATER *comes back.*)

LORD DUNWATER. Oh, there you are, my dear. I just came back to tell you not to miss seeing round this house. It's the most amazing place I ever was in. . . . I say, you're very smart this evening for a hard-working V.A.D. I thought you'd put away fine feathers for the duration—what ?

LADY ISOBEL. So I have. But to-day is—rather a special occasion, Daddy. (*Fingers her ring.*)

LORD DUNWATER. Special ? . . . (*Turns to ALF.*) You are greatly honoured, Mr. Wentworth.

ALF (*delighted*). I am that, sir.

(LADY ISOBEL *sees the mistake they are making, and is secretly amused.*)

LORD DUNWATER. Well, come along. You simply mustn't miss it.

(*A loud peal at the bell, accompanied by sharp knocking, announces somebody outside.*)

(*A SLAVE opens the door.*)

(MRS. DAVIES *pushes him aside and enters, followed meekly by her husband.*)

(ALF *is horror-struck.*)

MRS. DAVIES (*loudly*). Is Lord Dunwater here ? Oh, there you are, Lord Dunwater. They told me at the station you had arrived, and when I saw Lady Isobel's car outside this house, I came in.

LORD DUNWATER (*indicating ALF*). Er—Mr. Wentworth is . . . er . . .

MRS. DAVIES. I have not come to see Mr. Wentworth. I have come because I have something to tell *you*.

ALF *rubs the button and EUSTACE appears at the back of the hall.*)

I think you ought to know that . . .

(The spell of dumbness put upon her by EUSTACE takes effect. She tries to continue her sentence, but though she forms the words with her lips, no sound comes. She looks astonished and distressed.)

(The VICAR tries to come to the rescue.)

VICAR. Yes, we feel you ought to be told about . . . *(His voice trails away too.)*

(LORD DUNWATER and LADY ISOBEL exchange glances.)

LADY ISOBEL. I hope nothing awful's happened? Nobody's dead, or anything, are they?

VICAR *(distressed)*. Oh no—no. Nothing of the kind at all. Not in the least. My wife—er—that is, *I* thought Lord Dunwater had better be informed that . . . *(Again his voice is cut off.)*

(ALF begins to look a little happier.)

LORD DUNWATER *(politely)*. I'm afraid I don't quite understand.

VICAR *(more distressed)*. The whole matter is simply that . . . *(Ghastly pause.)* I mean to say, we . . .

(An uncomfortable silence, in the midst of which DENIS ALLEN and BILL enter.)

(BILL takes in the situation, and cocks an eye at ALF, who nods significantly.)

(Under cover of their approach, MRS. DAVIES clutches at her husband's arm.)

MRS. DAVIES. Julian! What is it? What's the matter with us?

MR. DAVIES. I don't know, my dear.

ALLEN *(looking round the group)*. Hallo! Is anything up?

VICAR. Oh no. We simply came to tell Lord Dunwater that . . . *(Again the dreadful pause.)*

ALLEN *(surprised)*. Yes?

VICAR. To tell him that . . . *(Pause.)*

(ALLEN looks from one to the other and then at LORD DUNWATER, who shakes his head and surreptitiously taps his forehead.)

LORD DUNWATER. Now, come, Mrs. Davies, never mind about that.

MRS. DAVIES (*with rising excitement*). We wanted to tell you that . . . (*Begins to lose control of herself*) Why can't I say it? I *will* say it . . . I *will*. I want to tell you that . . .

LORD DUNWATER (*soothingly*). Yes, yes. Please sit down and rest yourself. The heat . . . very trying . . . Mr. Wentworth.

ALF. Me lord?

LORD DUNWATER. I wonder if one of your servants could fetch some water.

ALF. Certainly, me lord.

(*ALF gives an order to MUSTAPHA.*)

MRS. DAVIES (*breaking away from LORD DUNWATER*). No! It isn't the heat. I won't sit down. You *must* know. I tell you that . . . (*Pause. Then in a scream.*) Ah! It's like a hand over my mouth—like an invisible hand. (*Turns on ALF and points at him.*) You—you . . . Ah!

(*With a final shriek, she turns and rushes out through the door.*)

(*MR. DAVIES follows her.*)

LORD DUNWATER. I think I'd better see them home, Mr. Wentworth.

ALLEN. I'll come with you, sir. There's something (*he looks at ALF*) that I think I ought to tell you.

(*They go out, leaving ALF alone with LADY ISOBEL.*)

LADY ISOBEL. Mr. Wentworth!

ALF. Yes, miss?

LADY ISOBEL. How have you got into Mrs. Davies' bad books?

ALF (*startled*). 'Ow—'ow d'yer mean, miss?

LADY ISOBEL. I don't know what's the matter with her, and I hope she hasn't gone mad or anything. But I'm certain that the reason why she came here was to try to make mischief between you and my father.

ALF. I think I know what it is, miss.

LADY ISOBEL. What?

ALF. You remember what that nigger butler o' mine thought about you yesterday?

LADY ISOBEL. What?—Oh, that Mr. Allen had brought me here to sell me to you as a slave?

ALF. Yes. Well, 'e made the same mistake about 'er.

LADY ISOBEL (*bubbling with laughter*). That the Vicar had . . . Oh, how wonderful! Poor man, I expect he only wishes he could.

ALF (*ruefully*). And what's more, 'e said she was worth nothing.

LADY ISOBEL (*with a little shriek of laughter*). Good Heavens ! That accounts for it ! She'll never forgive you. . . . If you hadn't got me and my father on your side, Mr. Wentworth, you might as well leave the neighbourhood at once.

ALF (*coming nearer and speaking earnestly*). S'long as I got you on my side, that's all as matters to me. Miss—tell me—was that right what 'is lordship said a bit back, about your putting on that pretty dress special for me ?

LADY ISOBEL. Oh, come now, Mr. Wentworth, that isn't a fair question. Er—may I ask you something ?

ALF (*infatuated*). Anything you like, miss.

LADY ISOBEL. Was it *your* idea to have Denmore done up like this ?

ALF. No, miss. It was Eustace—leastways, the manager of the firm I give the order to. But I 'ad the furniture put in, to make it more 'omelike. (*Hopefully.*) Why, miss, don't you like it ?

LADY ISOBEL. Of course, I think it's wonderful—only . . .

ALF. Only what, miss ?

LADY ISOBEL (*with tact*). I can't help thinking about it as it used to be, you know, with all the lovely old oak.

ALF (*overjoyed*). You don't like my furniture ?

LADY ISOBEL. Well—if I were furnishing Denmore, I shouldn't do it like that.

ALF. 'Ow would you ?

LADY ISOBEL. Just as it was before.

ALF. Tell me 'ow that was, an' I'll 'ave it done straight away.

LADY ISOBEL. But that's impossible. Think of the expense !

ALF. Expense is nothing to me.

LADY ISOBEL. But the firm . . .

ALF. They'll do what I tell 'em, an' quickly too. Eustace—that's the manager I spoke of—always was too 'olesale for my liking. This time I'm going to be 'olesale for a change.

LADY ISOBEL. But *why* . . . ?

ALF. If *you* don't like it, miss, that's quite enough for me. Now, miss, will you show me 'ow to do it ?

LADY ISOBEL. Why, of course. I should love to, if you really mean it.

ALF. You only got to say the word.

LADY ISOBEL. Well, as it happens, I brought along some photographs of the place as it used to be, in case you wanted to see them. They're in the car. I'll get them . . . you know, you're like a wizard in a fairy-tale.

(LADY ISOBEL goes out at the front door.)

(ALF, after a cautious look round to make sure he is unobserved, rubs the button.)

(EUSTACE appears.)

ALF. 'Ere—Eustace—if anyone comes, you must just 'op it quick, without waitin' to be told—see?

(EUSTACE bows.)

(ALF becomes familiar.)

Eustace, old buck, it's goin' splendid! She wants to arrange me 'ouse for me, just like what my mother said. (*Confidentially.*) I say, did you see 'er just now in that dress? Bit of all right, eh?

EUSTACE. O master, the maid is indeed of a rare beauty, like unto the full moon on the night of its completion.

ALF. Look 'ere, old man, take a tip from me. If ever you walks out with a English girl, don't go tellin' 'er she's got a face like a full moon. You may mean well, but she won't like it. 'Owever, that wasn't what I wanted to talk about.

EUSTACE. What is thy will, O master?

ALF (*a little uneasy*). Well, the fact is, I 'ope you don't mind, but I'm goin' to 'ave the 'ole 'ouse done up again. Mind you, I ain't denyin' you done your best, Eustace, but it ain't what 'er ladyship's used to. Now, she's gone to fetch some photographs of 'ow she'd like it done, an' I want you to get a squint at 'em. I s'pose you can do that without being seen?

EUSTACE. O master, I can render myself invisible, so that, seen of none, I can yet see all that my master doeth.

ALF (*disconcerted*). Oh, can yer? Well, all I can say is, I 'ope you're gent enough not to look at what don't concern yer. All right—make yerself invisible, then, and 'ang about. She'll be back in a minute. An' look 'ere . . .

EUSTACE. Master?

ALF. Mind you don't breathe down 'er neck or anything when you're lookin' at the photographs. I won't 'ave 'er startled. Oh, an', Eustace—I want a diamond necklace. A good 'un. Quick—'ere she comes!

EUSTACE. It is here.

(EUSTACE hands ALF a magnificent necklace and sinks through the floor as LADY ISOBEL returns.)

LADY ISOBEL. I'm sorry, Mr. Wentworth, but the car's gone. I'll have to show you the photographs later.

ALF (*nervously*). Er—miss—my Lady Isobel—you'll excuse me, I 'ope, but I've got a little present 'ere as I'd like you to 'ave.

(ALF begins to haul the necklace out of his trousers pocket.)

LADY ISOBEL (*puzzled*). A little present?

ALF. Yes. (*A last tug frees the necklace.*) I 'opes you likes di'monds?

LADY ISOBEL (*in pure astonishment*). Diamonds! (*Then, with a touch of chill in her voice.*) Mr. Wentworth, I really am very cross with you. You must not try to give me things—valuable things—like this. I can't possibly . . .

ALF (*breaking in*). There ain't nothing in the world as I wouldn't like to give yer, if you'll only let me.

LADY ISOBEL (*as a suspicion of his real meaning at last occurs to her*). You mean . . . you don't mean . . .

ALF (*doggedly*). I mean I wants you to 'ave it. Oh, miss, I don't 'ardly dare to tell you what I do mean. Can't you—can't you take it?

LADY ISOBEL (*gently, holding out her left hand*). It's very kind of you, Mr. Wentworth, but I'm afraid I never wear diamonds—excepting my engagement ring, and I only got that to-day.

ALF. Engagement ring?

(*The necklace falls to the ground.*)

LADY ISOBEL. Yes—to Mr. Allen, you know. It—it only happened yesterday, and we haven't announced it yet. Won't you be the first to congratulate us? It was in your house that it happened, you know.

ALF. *In my 'ouse!* (*Mechanically.*) I'm sure I 'opes you'll be very 'appy.

LADY ISOBEL. Thank you.

ALF (*gazing upwards*). Are you there, Eustace? Nice sort of blinkin' fool you've made of me this time.

LADY ISOBEL. Mr. Wentworth! What's the matter?

ALF. Nothin'—nothin'. (*He passes his hand over his forehead.*) I been a fool, that's all.

(LORD DUNWATER and DENIS ALLEN enter by the front door. They advance into the hall and ALLEN, after a significant glance at his companion, comes quietly to ALF's elbow and raps out one word.)

ALLEN. Higgins!

ALF (*coming involuntarily to attention*). Yessir!

ALLEN. Ah! So it is you, after all!

LADY ISOBEL (*surprised*). Higgins! Is this . . .?

ALLEN. Yes. And Mr. Montimorency is my Mr. Grant. (*He turns to LORD DUNWATER.*) It's as I suspected, sir. These scoundrels are in my old platoon. (*He addresses himself to ALF again in tones that hold much amusement and curiosity, but little of any more serious emotion.*) And what may you be doing here?

ALF. I . . . er . . . we . . . er . . .

ALLEN. Come on now, Higgins—let's have the truth. What on earth are you two chaps doing in a place like this, upsetting the whole neighbourhood? You'd better tell Lord Dunwater the facts, or you may get into serious trouble.

ALF. It's all right, sir. We're on our month's leave, sir—you know, sir . . .

(*ALLEN nods.*)

And I come into money—the 'ell of a lot of money.

ALLEN (*glancing round him*). Looks like it. Got your papers on you?

ALF. Yessir.

(*He produces them. ALLEN looks through them.*)

ALLEN. Hallo! I say, Higgins, you must have left your unit before your leave was due to begin.

ALF. We didn't, sir. Straight we never.

ALLEN (*serious now for the first time*). But look here—yesterday's date! You were *here* yesterday, so you must have left the Front before that. You know what this means: absence without leave on active service counts as desertion.

LORD DUNWATER. Absent without leave, are they? This looks like a job for my department.

ALF (*wildly*). It isn't, sir. We didn't. We left the battalion yesterday morning.

ALLEN. Then how did you manage to be here when we called yesterday morning?

ALF (*desperately casting about for inspiration—and getting it*). It's like this, sir. I told you I come into a fortune. Well—I got a friend o' mine, a Mr. Eustace, to bring us over—by air!

LORD DUNWATER. Bribing the Air Force, eh? It's as I've thought all along—the man's an impostor. The whole affair will have to be investigated. Isobel, please go home at once! (*He makes for the door.*)

LADY ISOBEL (*putting on her cloak*). In one moment, Daddy.

(*ALF turns to ALLEN.*)

ALF. We didn't do any wrong, sir—did we?

ALLEN. I don't know. It can't be right to bribe the Air Force. Looks like a court-martial, I'm afraid.

ALF. Oh, lumme! A court-martial!

(*He sinks into a chair, and buries his head in his hands. LADY ISOBEL puts her hand on ALLEN'S arm.*)

LADY ISOBEL. I don't see that any *real* harm's been done, Denis.

ALLEN. I suppose not. Still . . .

LADY ISOBEL. Couldn't you give Daddy your word that these two men are all right?

ALLEN. Of course I could. Still . . .

LADY ISOBEL (*comfortably*). That's all right, then. I'll see he behaves. Good-bye, Mr. Wentworth.

(*She and ALLEN go.*)

ALF (*out of the depths of his woe, hardly realising what is happening*). Good'bye, Miss—Miss Whatsyvername!

(*BILL enters, with the faithful LUCY.*)

BILL. What's up?

ALF. It's all up. Lootenant Allen's reckernised us, and we're goin' to be court-martialled.

BILL. Rats! They can't court-martial us while we got Eustace.

ALF. An' Lady Isobel's off, too. She's goin' to marry 'im.

BILL. 'Oo—Eustace?

ALF. No. Lootenant Allen.

BILL. Well, we can get rid of 'im too. Don't get the wind up over nothing, Alf. You wants a drink to cheer you up. I'll get you one.

(*He bustles off with LUCY on his errand of friendship. LIZ enters by the front door, and comes up behind ALF.*)

LIZ (*putting her hand on his shoulder*). Alf, I've come back.

(*ALF turns and gazes at her without recognition.*)

I can't give yer up. I've come back to say I'm sorry. Wickedness or no wickedness, I can't do it.

ALF. 'Oo are you?

LIZ. Alf, don't take it like that. I've said I'm sorry. Can't you forgive me?

ALF. But 'oo *are* yer? I don't know yer, I tell yer.

(*BILL returns with LUCY and the promised drink.*)

BILL. 'Ullo, Miss Walker. You back?

LIZ. I s'pose this is your doin'.

BILL. What is?

LIZ (*beginning to cry*). Makin' my Alf pretend 'e don't know me.

ALF (*perturbed*). Oo is it, Bill? *Ought* I to know 'er?

BILL. It's Liz Walker, as was your girl.

LIZ. Oh, Alf—don't yer *really* know me?

ALF. I should like to know yer all right . . . but . . . Bill, what's 'appened?

BILL. Why, it's Eustace—don't yer see?

ALF (*with sudden ferocity*). Eustace? I've 'ad about enough of Eustace!

(*He rubs the button. EUSTACE appears.*)

EUSTACE. What wouldst thou have, great Master?

ALF. Eustace, for the Lord's sake tell me 'oo this girl is.

(*EUSTACE makes a pass towards him. ALF seems dazed for a moment. Then he looks towards LIZ, and the light of joyous recognition dawns in his eyes. He springs forward and takes her in his arms.*)

ALF. Oh, Liz!

LIZ. Alf! An' you 'aven't forgotten me?

ALF. Forgotten? 'Ow could I ever forget yer!

LIZ (*radiant*). Alf!

ALF. Now look 'ere, Eustace—I dare say you done yer best for me, but I ain't goin' on with it. I'm through. What I want you to do is to take away everything in this 'ouse as you've put into it, an' put back everything 'as you found 'ere, just as it was when you came.

BILL (*springing at him*). Look 'ere, you fool, what's the game?

EUSTACE (*gravely*). Master, I hear and obey. (*He extends his arms.*)

(*The lights in the room go out instantly, leaving the place in pitch-darkness. A roll of thunder is heard, and the sound of a sudden gale of wind; against which LIZ's voice is to be heard in terror. The sounds die down, and the darkness is suddenly dispersed by moonlight which glimmers through the skylights. As your eyes become accustomed to the new light you see that all the Eastern hangings and furniture have disappeared. The original oak-panelled walls are once more visible and the room is otherwise completely bare.*)

(*ALF and BILL are back again in their worn khaki, and on the floor lie their rifles and equipment.*)

(*LUCY has disappeared too.*)

BILL (*furiously*). What d'you think yer doin'? You blinkin' fool! What's the idea? Think you're funny, I suppose.

ALF. I'm through with it, that's what it is. I've 'ad enough of Eustace an' 'is blinkin' button, that's what it is.

BILL. But look 'ere—Lucy's gone !

ALF. Yes, an' a good riddance too, if you ask me. If you'd given me a bit of 'elp instead of muckin' about with Lucy, this wouldn't 'ave 'appened. Any'ow, there's goin' to be no more of it.

BILL. D'you mean you ain't goin' to use the button no more ?

ALF. That's right.

BILL. You're barmy.

ALF (*unmoved*). P'r'aps I am.

BILL. Well—look 'ere. If you aren't goin' to want it again, you can give it to me.

ALF (*recoiling*). Not much.

BILL (*losing his temper*). Gimme that button ! (*He makes a rush at ALF.*)

ALF (*dodging*). You keep off, or I'll call up Eustace and 'ave yer changed into a—cross-eyed poodle !

BILL. Ho ! Will yer ?

(*He goes to the door, when he pauses and speaks again.*)

All right, Alf 'Iggins. I shan't forget the way you've served me over this. Me—yer own pal ! You just wait !

(*He goes.*)

LIZ (*looking about her*). But, Alf—where's it all gone to ?

ALF. I told Eustace to take it away.

LIZ (*shuddering*). 'Im !

ALF. Yes. I've done with 'im.

LIZ (*overjoyed*). Alf !

ALF. Yes, Liz. You was right. I was a fool to meddle with things like that. Nothing's gone properly right with me since I 'ad that button. But it's all right now, Liz, ain't it ?

LIZ. Yes, Alf.

ALF. An' you'll come straight off 'ome with me now an' we'll be married.

LIZ. Yes, Alf.

(*They kiss.*)

LIZ. Alf, where is it—the button, I mean ?

ALF. 'Ere it is.

LIZ. Chuck it away.

(*ALF makes as if to throw it out of the window. Then he hesitates.*)

To please me !

ALF. 'Ow about just one last little wish, Liz ?

LIZ (*starting away from him*). What ?

ALF. Just a little one. Nothin' 'olesale. A little 'ouse in 'Ackney and two quid a week for life.

LIZ (*violently*). No, Alf—no! I won't marry you. I won't touch a penny. It's wicked. It nearly parted us, and it never done you no good. 'Ere, give it me!

ALF (*hesitating*). If it was anybody but you, Liz . . .

(*Nevertheless, he does give it to her. She nerves herself, and rubs it. EUSTACE appears.*)

EUSTACE (*to LIZ*). What wouldst thou have? I am ready to obey thee as thy slave, and the slave of all those that have that button in their possession. I, and the other slaves of the button.

LIZ. Please, sir, if I was to give the button back to you, what would 'appen?

EUSTACE (*with a glint of hope in his eye*). O Lady of Beauty—then would thy slave be set free from this servitude, both I and the other slaves of the button, and the age-long spell would be broken!

LIZ (*holding out the button at the extreme length of her arm*). 'Ere you are, then. Take it.

(*EUSTACE is about to take it when ALF snatches it.*)

ALF. 'Ere—what's the idea?

(*EUSTACE turns away with bitter disappointment in his look. ALF sees him.*)

Oh well, p'raps you're right. 'Ere you are, Eustace . . . An' I 'opes you'll be 'appy. 'Ere, Liz. Come an' say good-bye to Eustace, just to show there's no ill-feeling.

(*LIZ, though obviously terrified, puts her hand out. EUSTACE responds with a low obeisance and a wonderful look of joy. He raises his hands.*)

EUSTACE. Ten thousand blessings be upon thy head, O my mistress, daughter of mercy and loveliness! May thy beauty be increased, and may thy life be long, and mayst thou bear unto thine husband fifty strong sons.

(*EUSTACE vanishes.*)

LIZ (*in horror*). Alf—fifty sons!

ALF (*with dropped jaw*). Lumme—'e's been 'olesale again!

(*The CURTAIN falls, leaving them wondering just how much chance there is that EUSTACE'S wish will come true. After all, he had the button in his hand . . .*)

KP-354-550

